

THE COLLECTED NOVELS
AND STORIES OF
GUY DE MAUPASSANT

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MONT-ORIOL

The
Collected
Novels
and
Stories of
Guy
de
Maupassant

Translated and Edited
by Ernest Boyd

Mont- Oriol

by
Guy de Maupassant



New York
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1924

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MONT-ORIOL

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*The translation of the stories in this
volume is by Storm Jameson, edited and
seen through the press by Ernest Boyd.*

MONT-ORIOL

PART I

I

THE first bathers, early risers who had already been into the water, were walking slowly, two by two or singly, under the great trees, along the side of the stream that flows down from the gorges of Enval.

Others were arriving from the village and entering the bath-house with a hurried air. It was a large building, in which the ground floor was entirely given over to the thermal treatment, while the first floor provided a casino, a café, and a billiard room.

When Doctor Bonnefille discovered, in the dale of Enval, the great spring which he had christened Bonnefille Spring, a number of local landowners, timid speculators, decided to construct, in the middle of this superb Auvergne valley—a wild but pleasant valley, planted with walnut-trees and giant horse-chestnuts—an enormous house suitable for every purpose; it would serve equally well for the cure and for pleasure; downstairs could be obtained mineral waters, douches, and baths, and, upstairs, beer, liqueurs, and music.

Part of the ravine, adjoining the stream, had been enclosed, in order to form the park indispensable to a spa; three paths had been marked out, one almost straight and the other two winding; at the end of the first path an artificial spring connected with the principal spring had been brought to the surface, and bubbled in a large cement basin, sheltered by a thatched roof,

and under the guardianship of an impassive woman whom everyone familiarly called Marie. This calm Auvergne peasant, wearing a little cap that was always very white, and almost entirely covered by a large apron that was always very clean and quite hid her working-dress, would get slowly to her feet as soon as she saw a patient coming along the path. When she recognised him, she would find his glass in a small, movable, glass-fronted cupboard, and carefully fill it with a zinc ladle attached to the end of a stick.

The melancholy patient would smile, drink, and give his glass back, saying, "Thank you, Marie"; turn round and depart. And Marie would sit down again on her cane chair and wait for the next arrival.

They were not numerous. The Enval establishment had been open to invalids for only six years, and numbered scarcely more clients, after these six years of practice, than at the beginning of the first. Some fifty were accustomed to go there, attracted above all by the beauty of the country, by the charm of this little village buried among the huge trees whose twisted trunks seemed as big as the houses, and by the fame of the gorges in this strange corner of the valley opening out into the great plain of Auvergne, and ending abruptly, at the foot of the lofty mountain-range bristling with extinct craters, in a wild, magnificent ravine, full of rocks already fallen or threatening to fall, where flows a stream that dashes over the giant boulders and, at each one it meets, forms a little lake.

This thermal station had begun, as they all do, with a pamphlet on its spring by Doctor Bonnefille. He led off by boasting the Alpine attractions of the place in majestic and sentimental vein. He had used nothing but the choicest and most splendid adjectives, such as create their effect without saying anything. Every district was picturesque and abounded in magnificent sites

or in views of intimate charm. All the nearest walks were possessed of markedly original character, that would immediately impress artists and tourists. Then abruptly, without any sort of transition, he fell to discoursing of the therapeutic ingredients of the Bonne-fille spring, bicarbonate, sodium, mixed minerals, acids, lithium, chalybeate water, *et cetera*, well suited for the cure of every malady. These he had also enumerated under the heading: "Chronic or acute affections especially likely to yield to the Enval course of treatment"; and the list of such affections was a long and varied one, most comforting to sufferers of every category. The pamphlet ended with useful information on such practical subjects as the price of accommodation, commodities on sale, and hotels. For three hotels had sprung up simultaneously with that medicinal casino. They were the Splendid Hotel, quite new, built on the slope of the valley, overlooking the pump-room; the Hôtel des Thermes, an old inn reconstructed, and the Hôtel Vidaillet, formed simply by the purchase of three adjoining houses made into one by means of judicious demolition.

At the same time two new doctors were found one morning to have installed themselves in the place, without anyone quite knowing how they had come there, for, in health resorts, doctors seem to rise from the springs as the bubbles of gas do. They were Doctor Honorat, an Auvergne man, and Doctor Latonne, of Paris. A fierce hatred had immediately sprung up between Doctor Latonne and Doctor Bonnefille, while Doctor Honorat, a big, clean, close-shaven man, smiling and smooth, had held out his right hand to the first, his left hand to the second, and remained on good terms with both. But Doctor Bonnefille dominated the situation, thanks to his title of inspector of the waters and thermal establishment of Enval-les-Bains.

This title was his strength, and the pump-room his concern. He spent his days there, and even, it was said, his nights. A hundred times each morning he would walk from his house, quite close to the village, to his consulting-room installed on the right-hand side of the entrance corridor. Ambushed therein like a spider in its web, he watched the comings and goings of the patients, surveying his own severely and those of the other doctors furiously. He questioned everybody, almost in the manner of a sea-captain, and terrified all those new arrivals who did not laugh at him.

To-day, as he was coming up to the entrance at a rapid pace that made the vast skirts of his old frock-coat flop behind him like two wings, he was abruptly stopped by a voice shouting: "Doctor!"

He turned round. His thin face, with deep, ugly wrinkles showing black at the centre, and a dirty, greyish beard seldom trimmed, made an effort to smile, and he took off the ill-brushed, stained, greasy top-hat with which he covered his long, pepper-and-salt hair — "pepper and soot," as his rival, Doctor Latonne, called it. Then he walked forward, bowed, and murmured:

"Good morning, marquis; are you well this morning?"

The Marquis de Ravenel, a small, very well-groomed man, offered his hand to the doctor and replied:

"Yes, very well, doctor, very well, or, at any rate, not so bad. My kidneys are still troubling me, but I'm better, much better, and I'm only at my tenth bath as yet. Last year I obtained no relief till the sixteenth; you remember?"

"Yes, perfectly well."

"But it was not of this that I wished to speak. My daughter arrived this morning, and I want to consult you about her at once, because my son-in-law, Monsieur Andermatt, William Andermatt, the banker . . ."

"Yes, I know."

"My son-in-law had a letter of introduction to Doctor Latonne. As for myself, I have confidence only in you. Will you be so good as to come up to the hotel before . . . you understand . . . I preferred to tell you the state of affairs frankly. . . . Are you disengaged at the moment?"

Doctor Bonnefille had put on his hat, very excited and uneasy.

"Yes, I am disengaged in a moment," he replied immediately. "Do you want me to come with you now?"

"Yes, certainly."

And, turning their backs on the pump-room, they rapidly ascended a curved road that led to the door of the Splendid Hotel, built on the hill-side in order that visitors might enjoy the view.

Arrived at the first floor, they entered the sitting-room adjoining the rooms of the Ravenel and Andermatt families; the marquis left the doctor alone, and went to find his daughter.

He returned with her almost immediately. She was a fair-haired young woman, small, pale, and very pretty; her features were childlike, while her audacious blue eyes radiated an air of resolution that gave a charming appearance of firmness and unusual strength of character to her dainty and delicate person. There was not much the matter with her: vague discomfort, melancholy, unreasonable outbursts of weeping, illogical explosions of temper — in fact, anaemia. Above all, she longed for a child, and had vainly awaited its coming during the two years of her married life.

Doctor Bonnefille affirmed that the waters of Enval would be a sovereign remedy, and immediately wrote out his prescriptions.

These had always the formidable appearance of a public prosecutor's speech.

On a large white sheet of exercise-paper his commands were arrayed in numerous paragraphs of two or three lines apiece, written in a frantic hand, bristling with spiky letters.

And the potions, pills and powders, which she was to take before breakfast, in the morning, at midday, or at night, pursued one another down the page in a most ferocious manner.

You fancied that it ran:

“Seeing that Monsieur X is smitten with a chronic, incurable, and deadly disease,

“He is to take:

1. Sulphate of quinine, which will turn him deaf and make him lose his memory;
2. Bromide of potassium, which will destroy his stomach, weaken all his faculties, cover him with pimples, and make his breath fetid;
3. Iodine of potassium also, which, drying up all the secreting glands, those of the brain as well as the rest, will speedily render the patient as helpless as imbecile;
4. Salicylate of soda, whose curative properties are not yet proven, but which appears to conduct all sufferers so treated to a swift and devastating death.

“And, concurrently with these:

“Chloral, which causes lunacy; belladonna, which attacks the eyes; all the vegetable solutions and mineral compositions which infect the blood, corrode the organs, consume the bones, and cause everything spared by the disease itself to succumb to the course of treatment.”

He wrote for a long time, using both sides of the paper; then signed it as a magistrate would a warrant for arrest on a capital charge.

The young woman sat opposite him and watched; a hovering laugh curled the corners of her lips.

As soon as he had left, making a low bow, she took the ink-blackened paper, rolled it into a ball, and threw it into the fire-place; then, laughing out heartily, at last exclaimed:

"Oh, Father, where did you find that fossil? He looks exactly like an old-clo' man. . . . Oh! it's just like you to unearth a doctor who dates from before the Revolution! . . . Oh, how funny he is! . . . and dirty! . . . yes, dirty! . . . I really think he's made my pen-holder dirty."

The door opened, and they heard Monsieur Andermatt saying: "Come in, doctor." And Doctor Luttonne appeared. Straight, slim, and dressed correctly in an elegant coat, he was one of those men whose age baffles detection. The doctor from Paris carried in his hand the high silk hat that is the distinguishing mark of a doctor practising in most of the Auvergne watering-places; he wore no beard or moustache, and looked like an actor taking his country holiday.

The marquis, dumbfounded, did not know what to do or say, while his daughter appeared to be coughing into her handkerchief, to keep from laughing in the face of the new arrival. The latter bowed confidently, and sat down at a sign from the young woman. Monsieur Andermatt, who had followed him into the room, informed him in detail of his wife's situation, her ailments and their symptoms, the opinions of the doctors he had consulted in Paris, followed by his own opinion, supported by special reasons expressed in technical terms.

He was a man still quite young, a Jew, and a business man. He transacted affairs of all sorts and took a hand in all things with a nimbleness of mind, a swiftness of understanding, and a sureness of judgment that were quite marvellous. Already a little too stout for his meagre height, chubby, bald, and baby-faced, with fat hands and short legs, he looked unhealthily pink, and spoke with bewildering facility.

By sheer skill he had married the Marquis de Ravanel's daughter, in order to extend his speculations into a class of society not his own. The marquis had an

income of about thirty thousand francs, but Monsieur Andermatt, barely thirty years old at the time of his marriage, was already the possessor of five or six millions, and was in a fair way towards reaping in ten or twelve. Monsieur de Ravenal, an indecisive, irresolute man, changeable and weak, at first angrily rejected the suggestion of this union, indignant at the thought of seeing his daughter married to an Israelite; then, after six months' resistance, he yielded to the pressure of accumulated gold, and on condition that the children should be brought up in the Catholic religion.

But they were still waiting, and as yet no child was expected. It was then that the marquis, who for two years had been delighted with the Enval waters, remembered that Doctor Bonnefille's pamphlet promised, *inter alia*, to cure sterility.

He accordingly induced his daughter to come, and his son-in-law accompanied her to install her there and entrust her, on the advice of his Paris doctor, to the care of Doctor Latonne. So Andermatt had sought him out on his arrival, and was still engaged in enumerating his wife's symptoms. He ended by saying how much he suffered from his disappointed hopes of paternity.

Doctor Latonne heard him to the end; then, turning to the young woman, inquired:

“Have you anything to add, madame?”

“No, nothing whatever, monsieur,” she replied gravely.

“Then,” he continued, “may I ask you to be good enough to remove your travelling-dress and your corsets, and to put on a plain white dressing-gown, perfectly white?”

She was surprised; rapidly he explained his system.

“Why, upon my word, madame, it is very simple. Once upon a time doctors were convinced that every

disease resulted from a weakness in the blood or from some organic defect, but in these days we think simply that in many cases, and above all in your particular case, the vague trouble from which you suffer, and even serious maladies, very serious, even deadly disorders, may arise merely from the fact that some organ, having, under influences easily to be ascertained, attained an abnormal development to the detriment of its neighbours, is destroying the entire balance and harmony of the human body, modifying or arresting its functions, and impeding the play of all the other organs.

"A swelling of the stomach is sufficient to give rise to a belief in a disease of the heart, which, hampered in its movements, becomes violent, irregular, and sometimes even intermittent. Dilation of the liver or of certain glands may cause ravages which unobservant doctors attribute to a thousand foreign causes.

"The first thing to be done, therefore, is to discover if all the organs of the patient are of normal size and position, for very little is sufficient to upset a man's health. With your permission, then, madame, I will make a careful examination of you, and trace upon your dressing-gown the limits, dimensions, and positions of your organs."

He had put down his hat on a chair, and was talking freely. His large mouth, opening and shutting, creased two deep wrinkles in his shaven cheeks, which gave him a somewhat ecclesiastical air.

"Now that's what I call a good idea!" exclaimed the delighted Andermatt. "Very ingenious, so novel, so modern!"

"So modern," in his mouth, was the height of admiration.

The young woman, very much amused, got up and went to her room, returning in a few minutes in a white dressing-gown.

The doctor made her lie down on a couch; then, taking from his pocket a chalk-holder with three chalks, one black, one red, and one blue, he began to tap and sound his new client, covering the dressing-gown with little lines of colour, noting down each observation as he made it.

After a quarter of an hour of his work, she resembled a map of continents, seas, capes, rivers, kingdoms, and towns, and bearing the names of all these terrestrial divisions, for on each boundary line the doctor wrote down two or three Latin words, comprehensible to himself alone.

When he had listened to all Madame Andermatt's internal noises, and strummed upon all the surfaces, silent or sonorous, of her person, he took from his pocket a red leather, gold-tooled note-book, divided up in alphabetical order, consulted the index, opened the book, and wrote down: "Observation 6347—Mme. A aged 21."

Then, scanning from head to foot the coloured notes on the dressing-gown, reading them like an Egyptologist deciphering hieroglyphics, he wrote them down in his note-book.

"Nothing to be alarmed about," he declared, when he had finished; "nothing abnormal, except a slight, a very slight deviation which will be cured by thirty or so acidulated baths. You will also take three half-glasses of water every day before noon. Nothing else. I shall come and see you again in four or five days."

He rose, bowed, and went out so abruptly that they were all amazed. This rapid exit was his manner, his own private distinguishing mark. He thought it particularly good form, and imagined that it made a great impression on the patient.

Madame Andermatt ran to look at herself in the mirror, and burst out laughing like a happy child.

"Oh, how amusing they are, how funny they are! Isn't there another one? If so, I want to see him at once. Will, go and find him for me. There must be a third, and I want to see him."

"What do you mean, a third? A third what?" asked her husband in surprise.

The marquis was obliged to explain, with copious excuses, for he was a little bit afraid of his son-in-law. He told him that as Doctor Bonnefile had called on him, he had taken him to see Christiane, in order to have his advice, for he had great confidence in the opinion of the old local doctor who had discovered the spring.

Andermatt shrugged his shoulders and declared that Doctor Latonne alone should look after his wife, with the result that the marquis, now very uneasy, began to consider how best to treat the situation so as not to hurt the feelings of his own irascible doctor.

Christiane asked: "Is Gontran here?"

This was her brother.

"Yes," replied her father, "he has been here four days, with one of the friends he has often spoken of to us, Monsieur Paul Brétigny. They are touring together through Auvergne. They came here from the Mont-Dore and La Bourbale, and are going on to Le Cantal at the end of another week."

He then asked the young woman if she wanted to rest till lunch, after her night in the train; but she had had a good night in the sleeping-car, and only asked an hour to finish her toilet, after which she was eager to visit the village and the pump-room.

Her father and her husband went to their rooms and waited for her to be ready.

She soon summoned them, and they went down the hill together. She was delighted at once by the sight of this village built in the wood and the deep valley,

seemingly shut in on every side by mountain-high chestnut-trees. They were everywhere, standing where chance, four centuries ago, had planted them, in front of doors, in the court-yards, in the streets. Everywhere, too, were fountains, made of a great upright black rock, pierced with a little hole whence issued a thread of bright water widening into a circle and running into a trough. There was a cool scent of leaves and cow-sheds under the mighty trees, and the women of Auvergne were walking along the roads or standing beside their houses, spinning, with a rapid movement of the fingers, distaffs of black wool held in their girdles. Their short skirts showed their thin ankles, clad in blue stockings; their bodices, fastened on their shoulders by some sort of braces, revealed the linen sleeves of shifts through which thrust their rough, strong arms and bony hands.

Suddenly a quaint, jigging music struck on the ears of the party. It was like a hurdy-gurdy with a most meagre volume of sound, a worn-out, broken-winded, sick and sorry hurdy-gurdy.

“What is that?” exclaimed Christiane.

Her father burst out laughing.

“That’s the Casino orchestra. It takes four of them to make that noise.”

And he led her up to a red poster stuck to a corner of a farm-house, on which was printed in black letters:

CASINO OF ENVAL

Under the direction of M. Petrus Martel, of the Odéon Theatre

Saturday, July 6th

GRAND CONCERT

organised by the maestro Saint-Landri,

second prize-winner of the Conservatory.—*At the piano*: M. Javel, grand laureate of the Conservatory.—*Flute*: M. Noirot, laureate of the Conservatory.—*Double-bass*: M. Nicordi, laureate of the Royal Brussels Academy.

After the Concert, grand performance of

LOST IN THE FOREST

COMEDY IN ONE ACT BY M. POINTILLET

Dramatis Personæ

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| Pierre de Lapointe | M. Petrus Martel, <i>Odéon Theatre</i> |
| Oscar Léveillé | M. Petitnivelle, <i>Vaudeville Theatre</i> |
| Jean | M. Lapalme, <i>Grand Theatre, Bordeaux</i> |
| Philippine | Mlle. Odelin, <i>Odéon Theatre</i> |

During the performance, the orchestra will also be conducted by the maestro Saint-Landri.

Christiane read it aloud, and laughed in surprise.

“Oh, they will amuse you!” said her father. “But let us go and see them.”

They turned to the right and entered the park. The patients were walking slowly and gravely along the three paths, drinking their glasses of water, and departing again. Some were sitting on benches, and tracing lines in the gravel with the ends of their sticks or their sun-shades. They did not speak, and appeared not to think, scarcely to be alive, numbed and paralysed by the boredom of a spa. Only the weird noise of the orchestra jiggling in the calm pleasant air, coming none knew whence, produced none knew how, and floating under the leafage, seemed to jerk these mournful walkers into movement.

"Christiane!" cried a voice. She turned round; it was her brother. He ran up to her, kissed her, and, when he had shaken hands with Andermatt, took his sister by the arm and led her away, leaving his father and his brother-in-law behind.

They chatted together. He was a tall, elegant youth, always laughing like his sister, quick-minded as the marquis, indifferent to all that happened, but always eager to pick up a thousand francs.

"I thought you would be asleep," he said, "or else I would have come and kissed you good morning. And besides, Paul took me off this morning to the Château de Tournoël."

"Who is Paul? Oh, I know! Your friend!"

"Paul Brétigny. Of course, you don't know him. He's having a bath just at the moment."

"Is he ill?"

"No. But he's taking a cure all the same. He's been in love."

"And is taking acidulated baths — 'acidulated' is the right word, isn't it? — to aid his recovery."

"Yes. He does everything I tell him to do. Oh, he was very hard hit! He is a violent, fierce sort of fellow. He nearly died. He wanted to kill her too. She was an actress, a well-known actress. He loved her madly. And of course she betrayed him. There was a frightful scene. Afterwards, I took him away. He's better now, but he still thinks of her."

She had been smiling before; now, suddenly serious, she answered:

"I should like to see him."

To her, however, "love" had no great significance. She thought of it occasionally, just as a poor woman thinks of a pearl necklace or a diamond tiara, with a longing for a thing possible, but improbable. She imagined love in the image of various novels she had read in

idle moments, without attaching much importance to it. She had never been much of a dreamer, for she was born with a happy, tranquil, contented soul; although she had been married two years and a half, she had never awokened from the repose in which innocent young girls live their lives, that repose of heart, mind, and senses which, for some women, endures till death. Life seemed to her simple and good, without complications; she had never inquired the meaning or reason of it. She lived, slept, dressed in good taste, laughed, was satisfied! What more could she have asked of life?

When Andermatt presented himself as a suitor, she at first refused, with childish indignation, to become the wife of a Jew. Her father and her brother, sharing her repugnance, answered, with her and like her, by an absolute refusal. Andermatt disappeared and lay low, but, by the end of three months, he had lent Gontran more than twenty thousand francs, and the marquis, for other reasons, was beginning to change his mind. Though he acted on principle at first, he always yielded to insistence, impelled by his selfish love of peace.

“All Father’s ideas are muddled,” his daughter used to say of him, and it was true. Lacking dogmas and belief, he possessed only enthusiasms that changed from moment to moment. At one minute he would attach himself, with fleeting and poetic pride, to the ancient traditions of his race, and would be eager for a king, an intelligent, liberal-minded, enlightened, up-to-date king; at another, after reading a book by Michelet or some democratic thinker, he would have a passion for the equality of man, for modern ideas, for the vindication of the poor, the downtrodden, the suffering. He believed in everything, according to the moment, and when his old friend, Madame Icardon, whose connexion with several Israelites made her eager for the marriage of Christiane with Andermatt, began to preach it, she

knew well by what sort of reasoning he was best attacked.

She showed him the Jewish race now come to the hour of revenge, a race oppressed like the French people before the Revolution, and about to oppress others, thanks to the power of gold. The marquis, who had no religious faith, but was convinced that the idea of God was merely an aid to the law of the land, a stronger bulwark for the foolish, the ignorant, and the timorous than the simple idea of justice, treated dogmas with respectful indifference and confounded Confucius, Mahomet, and Jesus Christ in an equal measure of sincere esteem. And so the act of crucifying the last-named seemed to him not in the least a piece of original sin, but merely a political act of gross clumsiness. A few weeks were enough to make him admire the concealed, incessant, all-powerful labours of the Jews, everywhere persecuted. And, suddenly envisaging, with very different eyes, their final dazzling success, he considered it a just reparation for their long humiliation. He saw them as the masters of kings, who are masters of the people, sustaining their thrones or permitting their collapse, able to bankrupt a nation as though it were a wine-merchant, standing proudly before humbled princes and casting their impure gold into the stealthily opened coffers of the most Christian monarchs, to be thanked with titles and railway lines.

And he consented to the marriage of William Andermatt and Christiane de Ravenel.

Driven by the scarcely perceptible pressure of Madame Icardon, who had been her mother's old friend and, since the marquise's death, her own intimate confidante, a pressure combined with her father's insistence and her brother's not wholly disinterested indifference, Christiane consented — in much the same spirit as she would have consented to spend the summer in a place she did

not like — to marry the fat young millionaire: he was not ugly, but she did not love him in the least.

Now she thought him a nice fellow, complaisant, no fool, and kind to her in their intimate relations, but she often laughed at him in the company of Gontran, whose gratitude was treacherous.

“Your husband is pinker and balder than ever,” he said. “He looks like a faded flower or a shaved sucking-pig. Where *does* he get his colour from?”

“I’ve got nothing to do with it, I assure you,” she replied. “There are days when I want to stick him on a chocolate box.”

But they had reached the pump-room.

On either side of the door a man was sitting in a cane chair, back to the wall, smoking a pipe.

“Two real characters,” said Gontran. “Look at the one on the right, the hunchback in the Greek cap! That’s old Printemps, who used to be a jailer at Riom; now he’s the keeper, almost the director, of the pump-room at Enval. To his eyes, there has been no change, and he rules the patients as he used to rule his convicts. The bathers, to him, are still prisoners; the bathing-cabins cells, the shower-bath room a dungeon, and the place where Doctor Bonnefille washes out people’s stomachs with a Baraduc pump is a mysterious torture-chamber. He never touches his hat to anyone, for he acts on the principle that all condemned creatures are to be despised. He treats women with far more consideration, a consideration mingled with surprise, for he never had charge of any of them in the prison at Riom. That retreat being reserved for males alone, he has not yet accustomed himself to speaking to creatures of the other sex. — The other is the cashier; I defy you to get him to write your name — you will see.”

And Gontran, addressing the man on the left, slowly remarked:

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“Monsieur Séminois, this is my sister, Madame Andermatt, who requires a subscription ticket for twelve baths.”

The cashier, a very tall, very thin man, who looked very poor, rose, entered his office opposite the inspecting doctor’s consulting-room, opened his book, and asked:

“What name?”

“Andermatt.”

“I beg your pardon, sir?”

“Andermatt.”

“How do you spell it?”

“A-n-d-e-r-m-a-t-t.”

“Right.” And he slowly wrote it down. When he had finished, Gontran said:

“Please read out my sister’s name.”

“Certainly, sir. Madame Anterpat.”

Christiane, laughing till the tears came, paid for her tickets, and asked:

“What’s that noise overhead?”

“Come and see,” said Gontran, taking her arm.

Angry voices penetrated to their ears from the top of the staircase. They went up, opened a door, and saw a large café with a billiard table in the middle. On opposite sides of this table were standing two men in their shirt-sleeves, with cues in their hands, railing furiously at each other.

“Eighteen.”

“Seventeen.”

“I tell you I’m eighteen.”

“You’re not, you’re only seventeen.”

It was the director of the Casino, Monsieur Petrus Martel, of the Odéon Theatre, having his customary game with the comedian of his company, Monsieur Lapalme, of the Grand Theatre, Bordeaux.

Petrus Martel’s heavy, flabby belly wobbled under the shirt above his mysteriously hitched-up trousers; he

had been a strolling player in various districts, had taken on the job of directing the Enval Casino, and spent his days in consuming the drinks destined for those in their baths. He wore an enormous cavalry moustache, soaked from morning till night in the froth of beer and the sticky syrup of liqueurs; and, in the house of the old comedian he had recruited for his company, he had acquired an immoderate passion for the game of billiards.

Almost as soon as they got up, they began their game, insulting and threatening each other, cancelling the score, and beginning all over again; they scarcely left off for lunch, and could not endure that two customers should drive them from their green cloth.

They had therefore succeeded in making everyone stay away, and found life not unpleasant, although bankruptcy awaited Petrus Martel at the end of the season.

The downtrodden barmaid watched their interminable game from morning till night; from morning till night she listened to their endless wrangles, from morning till night she took tankards or liqueur glasses to the indefatigable pair of players.

But Gontran led his sister away.

“Come into the park,” he said; “it’s cooler.”

At the far end of the building, they suddenly caught sight of the orchestra in a Chinese kiosk.

A fair-haired young man was playing the violin with frenzied energy, and, by agitating his head, his waving hair, and his whole body, bowing, rising, and swaying to right and left like a conductor’s baton, he was controlling three singular musicians seated opposite him. It was the maestro Saint-Landri.

He and his assistants, a pianist whose instrument, mounted on castors, was wheeled up every morning from the pump-room vestibule to the kiosk, an enormous flautist who looked as though he were sucking a match

and tickling it with his fat puffy fingers, and a consumptive-looking double-bass, were producing, at the cost of infinite exertion, the perfect imitation of a broken-down hurdy-gurdy that had surprised Christiane in the village street.

As she paused to watch them, a gentleman bowed to her brother, and said:

“Good morning, my dear count.”

“Good morning, doctor.”

And Gontran introduced him:

“My sister — Doctor Honorat.”

She could scarcely restrain her mirth, faced by this third doctor.

He bowed and politely inquired:

“I hope Madame is not ill.”

“Yes, she is, but only slightly.”

He did not dwell on it, and changed the subject.

“You know, my dear count, that a most interesting sight will be seen presently at the foot of the valley.”

“What is it, doctor?”

“Old Oriol is going to blow up his famous landmark. That means nothing to you, of course, but to us it’s a great event.”

He explained it.

Old Oriol, the richest peasant in the neighbourhood — he was known to have an income of more than fifty thousand francs — was the owner of all the vineyards situated where the valley of Enval opens out into the plain. Just at the entrance to the village, at the widening of the valley, rose a small hill, or rather a large hillock, and on this hillock grew old Oriol’s best vines. In the middle of one of these vineyards, by the roadside, two yards from the stream, was a gigantic boulder, a landmark that interfered with cultivation and shaded a large part of the field which it dominated.

Every week for the past ten years, old Oriol had been

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declaring that he was going to blow up his landmark, but he never made up his mind to carry it out.

Whenever a young man left the district to join the colours, the old man used to say:

“When you come home on leave, bring me back some powder for my rock.”

And all the soldier-boys brought back stolen powder for old Oriol’s rock in their knapsacks. He had a whole trunkful of it, and still the landmark was not blown up.

During the past week he had at last been seen hollowing out the stone, with the help of his son, big Jacques, nicknamed Colosse, pronounced “Coloche” in the Auvergne dialect. That very morning they had filled the emptied belly of the enormous rock with powder; then they had sealed up the opening, allowing only a space for the passage of the fuse, a piece of pipe-lighter wick bought from the tobacconist. It was to be touched off at two o’clock. It would blow up at five past two, or, at the latest, ten past, for the piece of wick was a good long one.

Christiane was interested in the story, and already pleased at the idea of the explosion, a piece of childish amusement that appealed to her simple heart.

They reached the end of the park.

“What lies beyond this?” she asked.

“The ‘End of the World,’ ” replied Doctor Honorat; “a gorge with no way out, celebrated in Auvergne; it is one of the most beautiful freaks of nature in the country.”

But a bell rang behind them.

“What, lunch already!” exclaimed Gontran, and they turned round.

A tall young man was coming to meet them.

“Christiane, dear,” said Gontran, “may I introduce Monsieur Paul Brétigny?” and, turning to his friend, added:

"This is my sister, my dear fellow."

She found him ugly. His hair was black, short, and straight, his eyes round, with an almost harsh expression in them. His head too was quite round, and very powerful, reminding her of a cannon-ball; his shoulders were herculean, and altogether he looked something of a savage, lumpish and brutal. But from his coat, his underclothes, perhaps from his skin, was exhaled a very subtle, delicate perfume, unknown to the young woman, who wondered: "What is that scent?"

"Did you arrive this morning, madame?" he said. His voice was rather expressionless.

"Yes, monsieur," she replied.

But Gontran observed that the marquis and Andermatt were signalling to the young people to come to lunch at once.

Doctor Honorat took his leave of them, asking if they really intended to see the landmark blown up.

Christiane declared that she was going, and, leaning on her brother's arm, murmured on the way back to the hotel:

"I'm as hungry as a hunter. I shall be terribly ashamed to eat so much with your friend's eyes on me."

II

LIKE all table d'hôte meals, lunch took a long time. Christiane, who was not acquainted with all the surrounding faces, chatted with her father and her brother. Then she went up to rest until the time came for the landmark to be blown up.

She was ready much too early, and insisted on everyone going out, lest they should miss the explosion.

At the end of the village, where the valley widened, rose a lofty ridge, almost a hill; they climbed it under a blazing sun, up a little path that ran between the vines. When they reached the summit, the young woman uttered a cry of astonishment at the immense view spread suddenly before her eyes. In front of her lay an endless plain, that at first sight gave her the impression of an ocean. Veiled in a faint soft blue haze, this plain extended to the distant, almost invisible mountains, perhaps thirty or forty miles away. And under the delicate transparent mist that floated over this vast expanse of country, loomed towns, villages, and woods, the great yellow squares of ripe corn and the great green squares of pasture, factories with long red chimneys, and black, pointed steeples built of lava from extinct volcanoes.

“Now turn round,” said her brother.

She turned round. And behind her she saw mountains, immense mountains embossed with craters. In the foreground was the valley of Enval, a great flood of verdure, in which the hidden cleft of the gorges was almost lost to view. The tide of trees mounted the steep

slope right up to the first crest, that blocked the view of those above. But as they were standing just on the line between the plain and mountains, the latter were visible stretching far away to the left in the direction of Clermont-Ferrand and, in the distance, weird truncated peaks, like monstrous ulcers, stood out against the blue sky; they were extinct, dead volcanoes. And in the farthest distance, between two peaks, they caught glimpses of a third still higher, still more distant, rounded and majestic, bearing a queer object like a ruin on its crest.

It was the Puy de Dôme, the monarch of the Auvergne mountains, powerful and massive, and retaining on its head, like a crown set there by the greatest of all nations, the remains of a Roman temple.

“Oh, how happy I shall be here!” exclaimed Christiane.

She felt happy already, filled with the sense of well-being that floods body and soul, expands the lungs, and wakes to quick life every sense, in the instant of coming on a district that soothes your eyes, charms and inspires your mind, and wears an air of having expected you, so that you feel that it was here you were born.

There was a shout:

“Madame! Madame!”

And she saw Doctor Honorat, recognisable by his top-hat in the distance. He ran up and led the party to the other side of the ridge, over a grassy slope, to the side of a copse of small trees, where some thirty people were already waiting, a mingled crowd of visitors and peasants.

Below, the slope fell steeply to the Riom road, shaded by the willows sheltering its narrow river; and, in the middle of a vineyard bordering the stream, rose a pointed rock, to which two men, on their knees at its foot, seemed to be praying.

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The Oriols, father and son, were setting the fuse. On the road an inquisitive throng was watching, and in front of them was a lower, wavering line of small boys.

Doctor Honorat had chosen a good position for Christiane, who sat down with a beating heart, as though she were about to see the throng of people blown up together with the rock. The marquis, Andermatt, and Paul Brétigny lay down on the grass beside the young woman, while Gontran remained standing.

"My dear doctor," he said mischievously, "you must be much less busy than your confrères, who certainly have not an hour to waste at this little festivity."

"I'm not less busy," replied the doctor good-humouredly; "it is only that my patients take up less of my time. . . . And, besides, I would rather entertain my clients than physic them."

He had a slyly allusive manner that Gontran found delightful.

Other people were arriving, their neighbours in the hotel dining-room. There were the Pailles, two widows, mother and daughter; the Marécus, father and daughter, and a very short fat man, panting like a burst boiler, Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur, formerly a mining engineer, who had made a fortune in Russia.

The marquis had become intimate with him. He sat down very carefully, with many prudent and circumspect preliminaries, at which Christiane was vastly amused. Gontran had gone off to examine the other inquisitive people who, like them, had climbed to the ridge.

Paul Brétigny was pointing out to Christiane Andermatt the places visible in the distance. That first red stain of tiles upon the plain was Riom; then Ennezat, Maringues, Lezons — a host of indistinct villages, splashing the green cloth of the country-side with specks of

black. In the farthest distance, at the foot of the Forey mountains, he assured her that she could make out Thiers.

“Thiers,” he said, warming to his task, “in a line with my finger, in an exact line with my finger. I can see it perfectly.”

She could see nothing, for her part, but was not surprised that he could see it, for he stared like a bird of prey with his round steady eyes: they were as strong as marine binoculars, she thought.

“The Allier flows in front of us,” he went on, “in the middle of the plain there, but you can’t see it. It is too far away, twenty miles from here.”

She made no attempt to find the place he was pointing out to her, for her eyes and her attention were fixed on the landmark. Presently, she thought, that huge stone would be no more; it would fly off in powder. She felt a vague sense of pity for the stone, the pity of a little girl for a broken toy. The stone had been there so long; it was charming too and looked well there. The two men had risen and were heaping gravel round the foot of the rock, digging with the rapid movements of peasants in a hurry.

The crowd on the road had been steadily growing and had drawn nearer to watch operations. The urchins were actually touching the two men at work, running and walking round them like young animals at play; from Christiane’s lofty position all these people looked tiny, a crowd of insects, a toiling ant-heap. The murmur of their voices ascended, now faintly, almost imperceptibly, now more loudly, a confused hum of human speech and movement, but dissolving in the air and already evaporated as if it were the dust of noise.

The crowd on the ridge was also growing; people were arriving all the time from the village; they covered the slope that overlooked the condemned rock.

They called to one another and gathered in groups according to their hotels, their class, or their caste. The noisiest assemblage was that of the actors and musicians, presided over and ordered by their director, Petrus Martel, of the Odéon Theatre, who, in view of the special circumstances, had torn himself away from his frenzied game of billiards.

With a Panama hat on his brow, his shoulders covered by a black alpaca coat that permitted the protuberance of a large white expanse of stomach (for the actor with the noble moustaches saw no point in wearing a waistcoat out of doors), he assumed an air of command, pointing out, explaining, and discussing every movement of the two Oriols. His subordinates, Lapalme the comedian, Petitnivelle the juvenile lead, and the musicians, the maestro Saint-Landri, Noirot the enormous flautist, and Nicordi the double-bass, stood round him and listened. In front of them three women were sitting, sheltered by three sunshades, one white, one red, and one blue, which, under the early afternoon sun, formed a strange and dazzling French flag. They were the young actress Mademoiselle Odelin, her mother—"a mother on the hire system" Gontran called her—and the barmaid from the café, united in their usual alliance. The arrangement of the sunshades in the national colours was the invention of Petrus Martel, who at the beginning of the season had noticed the blue one and the white one in the hands of the Odelins, and had made a present of the red one to the barmaid.

Close by, another group attracted as much attention and notice; it was that of the cooks and scullions from the hotels, eight in number; a rivalry had sprung up between their kitchen-staffs, and to impress the spectators they had all put on white linen, even the humblest washers-up. They were all standing, and the fierce sun beat down on their flat caps. They gave the impres-

sion of being at one and the same time a delegation of cooks and a fantastic group of staff officers of the white lancers.

"Where do they all come from?" the marquis asked Doctor Honorat. "I should never have thought that Enval was so thickly populated."

"Oh, they've come from all over the place, from Châtel-Guyon, Tournvel, La Roche-Pradière, and Sainte-Hippolyte. It's been talked about in the neighbourhood for many a long day; old Oriol is a celebrity, a very considerable personality, of influence and wealth, and, what is more, a real Auvergne man who has always remained a peasant, doing his own work, a thrifty fellow, heaping up gold on gold, an intelligent man too, full of ideas and plans for his children."

Gontran came back, excited, with shining eyes. "Paul, Paul," he said in a low voice, "come along with me. I'm going to show you two pretty girls, really nice little things!"

"I'm quite all right here," answered the other, raising his head. "I shan't move."

"You're making a mistake. They're charming," answered Gontran, and, raising his voice, continued:

"But the doctor will tell me who they are: two girls of eighteen or nineteen, local beauties in quaint clothes, in black silk dresses with clinging sleeves, a sort of convent uniform, two brown—"

"That will do," interrupted Doctor Honorat. "They are old Oriol's daughters, two pretty little wenches, educated at the convent of the Black Nuns at Clermont . . . they will marry well . . . they are types, real types of our stock, the good stock of Auvergne; I'm an Auvergne man myself, monsieur le marquis, and I'll show you those two children—"

Gontran cut him short, asking slyly:

"Are you the Oriols' family physician, doctor?"

The other took the implied meaning and replied with a brief "Rather!" that expressed his amusement.

"And how," continued the young man, "did you succeed in gaining the confidence of such a wealthy client?"

"I prescribed plenty of good wine."

And he told them various facts about the Oriols. He was distantly related to them, and had known them a long time. The old father, a real character, was very proud of his wine; he had one vineyard in particular whose produce was always set aside to be drunk by the family and its guests. Some years they were able to empty the casks filled by this favourite vineyard, but other years they had great difficulty in achieving the feat.

In May or June, when the old man saw that it was going to be no easy matter to drink all that was left, he would sit about encouraging his big son Colosse, repeating: "Now, my son, we must get through it." Then they would start pouring pints of the red wine down their throats, from morning till night. A score of times, during every meal, the worthy man would say gravely, tipping the jug over his boy's glass: "We must get through it." And as all this alcoholic liquor heated his blood and prevented him from sleeping, he used to get up at night, slip on his breeches, light a lantern, and wake up "Coloche"; then they would go down to the cellar, taking from the cupboard a crust of bread that they moistened in the glassfuls drawn one after another, straight from the cask. Then, when they had drunk until they could feel the wine gurgling in their bellies, the father would tap on the sounding wood of the cask, to listen whether the level of the liquor had been lowered.

"And it is they who are working at the landmark?" asked the marquis.

"Yes, yes, that's right."

Just at that moment the two men strode rapidly away from the powder-filled rock, and the entire crowd that surrounded them below set running like a routed army. They fled towards Riom and Enval, leaving the great rock alone on a little ridge of short, stony turf, for it cut the vineyard in two, and the gound all round it was not yet cleared.

The crowd above was now as large as the other; it quivered with pleasure and impatience, and the lusty voice of Petrus Martel announced:

"Look out! The fuse is alight."

Christiane shuddered violently with suspense. But the doctor murmured from behind:

"Oh, if they have left all the fuse I saw them buy, we have a good ten minutes to wait."

All eyes were watching the rock, and suddenly a dog, a small black dog, a nondescript cur, approached it. It walked round it, sniffed at it, and doubtless discovered a suspicious scent, for it began to bark with all its might, with stiffened legs, bristling hair, tail outstretched, and ears erect.

A cruel laugh rose from the crowd; they hoped he would not go away in time. Then voices called, to get the beast away; men whistled and tried to hit it with stones that did not reach half-way. But the cur would not move, and continued to bark furiously at the rock.

Christiane began to tremble. She was horribly afraid of seeing the animal disembowelled; all her pleasure was over; she wanted to go; nervously she repeated, stammering and quivering with anguish:

"Oh, my God! Oh, my God! It will be killed! I won't see! I won't! I won't! Let's go!" . . .

Paul Brétigny, who was next to her, began to climb down towards the landmark with all the speed of his long legs.

Cries of horror broke from several mouths; a ripple of terror shook the crowd; and the cur, seeing this big man coming towards it, fled behind the rock. Paul pursued it; the dog came out again on the other side and, for a minute or two, they ran round the stone, vanishing or reappearing, now on the right, now on the left, as though they were playing a game of hide-and-seek.

At last, realising that he would not catch the animal, the young man climbed back up the slope, and the dog, very angry again, took up its yapping.

Exclamations of anger greeted Paul's return, breathless, imprudent Paul, for people never forgive those who have given them a fright. Christiane was choking with suspense, her two hands pressed over her leaping heart. She had lost her head to such an extent that she asked: "At any rate, you are not hurt?" While Gontran exclaimed furiously: "The senseless fool's mad! He's always doing silly things like that! I've never met such an idiot!"

But the earth was trembling, pushed up from underneath. A tremendous detonation shook the whole district and, for an interminable minute, thundered in the mountains, given back by all the echoes like as many cannon shots.

Christiane saw nothing but a rain of stones tumbling back and a high pillar of fine dust falling all over her.

The crowd on the top dashed forward at once like a wave, with shrill cries. The battalion of urchins ran leaping down the ridge, leaving behind it the regiment of actors that descended with Petrus Martel at its head.

The three tricolour sunshades were nearly swept away in the course of this descent.

Everyone was running, men and women, peasants and shopkeepers. They were seen falling, getting up, and starting off again, while on the road the two waves of people, that a few moments before had been driven back

by fear, were now dashing against each other, surging forward to the actual scene of the explosion.

"Let us wait a little," said the marquis, "until their curiosity has been appeased, and we will go and look in our turn."

Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur, the engineer, who with the most terrific exertion had just managed to get up, replied:

"I am going back to the village by the field paths. I've nothing more to do here."

He shook hands all round, bowed, and departed. Doctor Honorat had disappeared, and they began to talk about him.

"You have only known him three days," said the marquis to his son, "and you are always laughing at him; you will end by hurting him."

"Oh, he's a wise old bird," said Gontran, shrugging his shoulders, "and a sound sceptic. I'll answer for it that he won't be angry. When we two are by ourselves, he laughs at everyone and everything, beginning with his patients and the waters. I promise to present you with an extra bathe if you ever see him annoyed by my chaffing."

Below, on the site of the vanished landmark, there was a scene of extraordinary confusion. The vast heaving crowd jostled, billowed, and shouted, obviously overcome with unexpected excitement and wonder.

"What is the matter with them? What on earth is the matter with them?" repeated the always energetic and inquisitive Andermatt.

Gontran declared that he would go and see, and he departed, while Christiane, now quite calm, reflected that a slightly shorter length of fuse would have meant the death, rent asunder by flying stones, of the absurd giant at her side, just because she had expressed her fear for the life of a dog. The man must be uncommonly

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hot-blooded and passionate, she thought, thus to risk his life for no reason, as soon as a woman unknown to him expressed a wish.

On the road, people could be seen running towards the village.

“What is the matter with them?” wondered the marquis, in his turn, and Andermatt, unable to restrain himself any longer, began to descend the hill.

From below, Gontran was beckoning them to come.

“Will you take my arm, madame?” asked Paul Brétigny.

She took it; it felt as hard and unimpressionable as iron. As her feet were slipping on the warm turf, she leant on it, as she would have leant on a rail, with absolute confidence.

Gontran came to meet them, crying:

“It’s a spring. The explosion has set a spring flowing.”

They entered the mob of people. The two young men, Paul and Gontran, walking in front, jostled the inquisitive crowd aside and, ignoring angry exclamations, opened a way for Christiane and her father.

They walked through a chaos of sharp, broken stone, black with powder, and arrived at a hole full of muddy water that bubbled up and flowed away towards the river, between the feet of the curious throng. Andermatt was already there, having got through the crowd by various processes of insinuation peculiar to him, said Gontran, and with profound attention was watching the water rising from the soil and pouring away.

Doctor Honorat, standing opposite him on the other side of the hole, was also watching it with an expression of bored astonishment.

“You must taste it,” said Andermatt; “it may be mineral.”

“It is sure to be mineral,” answered the doctor; “they

all are, here. There will soon be more springs than patients."

"But it is essential that it should be tasted," replied the other.

The doctor was not concerned about it.

"At least we must wait till it is clean."

Everyone was eager to see. Those in the second rank pushed those in front into the mud. A child fell in, raising a burst of laughter.

The Oriols were there, both father and son, gravely contemplating this unexpected result, and not yet certain what they ought to think of it. The father was a dried-up old figure, a tall thin body with a long head, the grave, beardless head of a peasant; the son, a still taller giant, and equally thin, wore a moustache and resembled at once a cavalryman and a vine-dresser.

The water seemed to eddy more violently, its flow increased, and it began to grow clear.

There was a movement in the crowd and Doctor Latonne appeared, a glass in his hand. He was perspiring and panting, and halted thunder-struck at sight of his fellow practitioner, Doctor Honorat, standing with one foot over the new spring like a general who has been the first to enter a town.

"Have you tasted it?" he asked, gasping for breath.

"No; I am waiting till it is clean."

Thereupon Doctor Latonne dipped his glass into the water and drank it with the profound air of an expert wine-taster. "Excellent," he declared, a decision which did not compromise him, and, offering the glass to his rival, asked:

"Will you taste it?"

But Doctor Honorat was decidedly not fond of mineral waters, for he replied with a smile:

"No, thank you! It is quite enough for me that you should have appreciated it. I know the taste of them."

He knew the taste of them all, and appreciated it too, but in a different way.

Then, turning to old Oriol, he observed:

"Your excellent wine is better stuff."

The old man was flattered.

Christiane had seen enough and wanted to go. Her brother and Paul once more cleared a way for her through the throng. She followed, leaning on her father's arm. Suddenly she slipped, almost fell, and, looking down at her feet, saw that she had stepped on a piece of bleeding flesh, covered with black hairs and shiny with mud; it was a morsel of the cur blown to bits by the explosion and trampled by the crowd.

She fought for breath, so distressed that she could not restrain her tears. "Poor little beast! Poor little beast!" she murmured, drying her eyes with her hand-kerchief. She did not want to hear any more; she longed to go back and shut herself up in her room. The day, so happily begun, was ending badly for her. Was it an omen? Her heart contracted with fear and beat violently.

They were now alone upon the road and they saw in front of them a top-hat and the two skirts of a frock-coat waving like two black wings. It was Doctor Bonne-fille, the last to hear the news, running up, glass in hand, like Doctor Latonne.

He stopped at sight of the marquis.

"What is it, monsieur le marquis? . . . They told me . . . a spring! . . . a mineral spring? . . ."

"Yes, doctor."

"Abundant?"

"Yes."

"Is . . . are . . . are they there?"

"Yes, certainly they are," replied Gontran with an air of complete seriousness. "Doctor Latonne has already analysed it."

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Thereupon Doctor Bonnefille began running again, and Christiane, somewhat distracted and amused at the figure he cut, said:

“No, I won’t go back to the hotel after all; let us go and sit in the park.”

Andermatt had remained behind, to watch the water flowing.

III

DINNER that evening at the Splendid Hotel was a noisy affair. The adventure of the landmark and the spring excited conversation. The guests were not numerous, however, a score at most, taciturn, peaceful people, as a rule, invalids who had tried all the well-known waters in vain and were now experimenting with new spas. At the end of the table occupied by the Ravenels and the Andermatts were, first, the Monécus, a little man, very white, with his daughter, a tall, pale girl who sometimes got up in the middle of a meal and went out, leaving her plate half full; then stout Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur, the retired engineer; the Chassfours, a black-clad couple to be met at all times of the day on the paths in the park, walking behind a little carriage that held their deformed child; and the Pailles, mother and daughter, both widows, tall and stout, stout all round, front and back. "You can see," as Gontran said, "that they've eaten their husbands, and it has given them stomach-ache."

It was, as a matter of fact, digestive trouble that they had come to treat at Enval.

Farther off sat a very red-faced, brick-coloured man, Monsieur Riquier, whose digestion was bad likewise, and then other colourless people, those dumb travellers who walk silently into hotel dining-rooms, the women in front and the men behind, bow at the door, and achieve their seats with a timid and modest air.

The whole of the other end of the table was empty, though the places there were laid for future guests.

Andermatt was talking with great animation. He had spent the afternoon chatting with Doctor Latonne, throwing off ideas for developments in Enval.

With ardent conviction the doctor had enumerated to him the surprising merits of its waters, far superior to those of Châtel-Guyon, though the vogue for the latter had definitely asserted itself in the last two years.

On the right, then, was that wretched hole Royat, in the height of fame and fortune, and, on the left, that wretched hole Châtel-Guyon, already going strong, though so lately started. What might not be done with Enval by a man who knew how to set about it!

“Yes, monsieur,” he said to the engineer, “it’s all a question of knowing how to set about it. It’s all a matter of skill, tact, opportunism, and audacity. In order to create a spa, you must know how to start it, that is all, and in order to start it, you must interest the great body of Paris doctors in it. I always succeed in what I undertake, because I always look for the practical method, the only one that is bound to determine the success of the particular case with which I am concerned. If I have not found the method, I do nothing, I wait. It is not enough to have the water, you must get people to drink it; to get it drunk, it is not enough to declare in the papers and elsewhere that it is unrivalled! You must know how to get it discreetly said by the only men who influence the spa-going public, the invalid public we need, the particularly credulous public that buys medicaments — by the doctors, in fact. Do not speak to a judge except through counsel; they are the only people he will listen to, the only people he will understand; do not speak to a patient except through his doctor; that is the only man he will listen to.”

The marquis, who much admired his son-in-law’s practical and confident common sense, exclaimed:

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"Ah! How true that is! You are unique, my dear fellow, in your accurate grasp of affairs."

"There is a fortune to be made here," continued Andermatt, much excited. "The country is beautiful, the climate excellent; only one thing causes me anxiety: should we have enough water for a big pump-room? Things done by halves always come to grief! We should need a very big pump-room and, in consequence, a great deal of water; and the new spring, added to the old one, would not supply more than fifty, whatever Doctor Luttonne may say"

Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur interrupted him:

"Oh, as for water, I will give you as much as you like!"

"You?" exclaimed Andermatt, amazed.

"Yes, I. That surprises you. Let me explain. Last year, at this season, I was here, as I am this year; I find the Enval baths suit me very well. One morning I was resting in my room, when I saw a stout gentleman come in. It was the chairman of the pump-room committee. He was very worried, and for the following reason: The Bonnefile spring was reduced to such an extent that they feared it would fail altogether. Knowing me to be a mining engineer, he came to ask me whether I could find a way of saving his livelihood.

"I accordingly set myself to study the geological conditions of the district. You know that in every locality prehistoric upheavals have caused various disturbances and conditions of the soil.

"Well, it was all a matter of discovering where the water came from, through what fissures, and the direction, origin, and nature of these fissures.

"First of all, I made a careful inspection of the pump-room, and, observing in a corner an old disused bath-pipe, I noticed that it was already almost completely blocked up with a deposit of lime. The water was depositing the salts it contained on the lining of the pipes,

and rapidly blocking them up. The same thing must inevitably be happening to the natural conduits in the soil, the geological formation being granite. The Bonne-fille spring, then, was blocked up. That was all.

“It was necessary to find it again elsewhere. Everyone else would have looked for it above the point of its original issue. But I, after a month of study, observation, and reasoning—I looked for and found it fifty metres lower down. And this is why:

“I told you before that the first thing to discover was the origin, nature, and direction of the fissures in the granite along which the water is conducted. It was easy for me to ascertain that these fissures ran from the plain to the mountains, and not from the mountains to the plain. They were inclined like a roof, and were undoubtedly due to the subsidence of the plain, which dragged down the lower spurs of the mountains in its collapse. The water, then, instead of descending, rose through each interstice in the layers of granite. And I also discovered the cause of this unforeseen phenomenon.

“Once upon a time the Limagne, that vast expanse of sandy and clayey soil whose bounds are almost out of sight, was on the same level as the first plateau in the mountains; but by reason of the geological formation of the ground beneath, it sank, dragging the edge of the mountains with it, as I explained just now. Now this gigantic heaping up of material produced, just at the dividing line between soil and granite, an immense barrier of clay, of enormous depth and impenetrable by liquids.

“And this is what happens:

“The mineral waters issue from the furnaces of the old volcanoes. The water which comes from a great distance cools on the way and comes to the surface ice-cold, as in the ordinary springs; that which comes from

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furnaces nearer at hand gushes out still warm, at different temperatures, according to the proximity of the heating agent. But this is the route it follows: It descends to unknown depths, until it meets the barrier of Limagne clay. Unable to traverse it, and subjected to great pressure, it seeks an issue. It finds the sloping cracks in the granite, flows into them, and ascends them till they reach the surface. Then, resuming its old direction, it flows down towards the plain in the ordinary beds of the streams. I should add that we do not see a hundredth part of the mineral waters of these valleys. We discover only those whose point of issue is in open ground. As for the rest, arriving at the edge of the granite fissures under a thick layer of agriculturally cultivated soil, they are lost in this soil, which absorbs them.

“Whence I conclude:

“1. That in order to have water, it is enough to look for it by following the inclination and direction of the layers of superimposed granite.

“2. That in order to keep it, it is enough to prevent the fissures from becoming blocked by deposits of lime; that is to say, by keeping the small artificial wells in good order by careful repair.

“3. That in order to steal a neighbour’s spring, it is necessary to sink a well down to the same fissure of granite below him, not above him, on condition, of course, that one remains on the near side of the clay barrier that forces the water to rise.

“From this point of view, the spring discovered to-day is admirably situated, only a few metres from this barrier. If anyone were anxious to start a new pump-room, that would be the place to build it.”

There was a silence as he stopped speaking.

“That’s just it,” was the only thing the delighted Andermatt could find to say. “When you are shown the

ins and outs of the matter, all the mystery vanishes. You are a treasure, Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur."

The marquis and Paul Brétigny were the only other people to understand him. Gontran alone had not been listening. The rest, eyes and ears agape, hanging on the engineer's lips, remained in a state of bewilderment. The Pailles particularly, being very pious, wondered if there were not something irreligious about this explanation of a phenomenon ordained by Providence and accomplished by His mysterious methods.

The mother thought she ought to remark:

"God moves in a mysterious way."

Some ladies at the middle of the table nodded approval, being likewise distressed at hearing these incomprehensible remarks.

"I don't care whether the Enval waters come from volcanoes or the moon," declared Monsieur Riquier, the red-faced man. "I've been taking them for ten days, and have not yet felt any effects from them."

Monsieur and Madame Chassefour protested on behalf of their child, who was beginning to move his right leg, a thing unknown in the whole of the six years during which he had been under treatment.

"Damn it," replied Riquier, "that proves we have not the same disease; it does not prove that the water of Enval cures affections of the stomach."

He seemed furious, exasperated at his new and futile experiment.

But Monsieur Monécu spoke up for his daughter, and declared that during the past eight days she had begun to be able to take nourishment without being obliged to leave the room at every meal.

His tall daughter blushed, her nose in her plate.

The Pailles also thought they were better.

At that Riquier flared up and, turning abruptly to the two ladies, demanded:

"And have you ladies got indigestion?"

"Yes, monsieur," they answered together, "we cannot digest a thing."

He almost bounded up from his chair, and stammered:

"You . . . you . . . It's enough to look at you. You suffer from indigestion, ladies! That means you eat too much."

Madame Paille the elder lost her temper and retorted:

"As for you, monsieur, there is no doubt about it, you are displaying just the disposition of a man whose stomach has been ruined. How true it is that a good digestion makes a pleasant man!"

A very thin old lady, whose name no one knew, said with an air of authority:

"I think we should all derive more benefit from the waters of Enval if the hotel cook occasionally remembered that he is cooking for invalids. He sends up food which it is positively impossible to digest."

The whole company suddenly found itself in agreement. There was general indignation against the hotel proprietor, who gave them crayfish, delicatessen eels with tartare sauce, and pickled cabbage, yes, pickled cabbage and sausages, all the most indigestible viands in the world for these people, for whom the three doctors, Bonnefille, Latonne, and Honorat, had prescribed nothing but white meat, lean and tender, fresh vegetables, and milk foods.

Riquier trembled with rage:

Don't you think doctors ought to supervise the meals at spas, and not leave such a vitally important matter as the choice of food to the opinion of a brute beast? Every day we get boiled eggs, anchovy, and ham for hors d'œuvres. . . ."

But Monsieur Monécu interrupted him:

"Excuse me, but ham is the only thing my daughter

can properly digest, and Mas-Roussel and Rémusot prescribed it for her."

"Ham!" exclaimed Riquier. "Ham! Why, it's poison, sir!"

And of a sudden the table was divided into two clans, one tolerating and the other refusing to tolerate ham.

And an interminable discussion began, resumed every day, on the classification of food.

Milk itself was the subject of heated discussion, Riquier being unable to drink a claret-glass of it without having an immediate attack of indigestion.

Aubry-Pasteur, also irritated, replied that they were disputing the qualities of the things that he adored.

"Why, damn it, sir, if you have dyspepsia, and I gastric trouble, we require food as different as glasses for the short-sighted and the long-sighted, though both of them have bad eyesight. As for me," he added, "I faint after a glass of red wine; I don't think there is anything worse for men than wine. All the water-drinkers live a hundred years, while we . . ."

"Oh, Lord!" replied Gontran with a laugh, "without wine and . . . marriage, life would be pretty dull!"

The Pailles lowered their eyes. They drank an abundant quantity of good claret, without water; and their double widowhood suggested that they had applied the same system to their husbands, the daughter being twenty-two and her mother barely forty.

But Andermatt, ordinarily so talkative, was taciturn and thoughtful. Suddenly he asked Gontran:

"Do you know where the Oriols live?"

"Yes, I was shown their house just now."

"Could you take me there after dinner?"

"Certainly. I shall positively enjoy accompanying you. I shall not be sorry to see those two girls again."

And as soon as dinner was over they set out, while Christiane, who was tired, the marquis, and Paul Bré-

tigny went up to the drawing-room to spend the rest of the evening.

It was still broad daylight, for dinner at a spa is an early affair.

Andermatt took his brother-in-law's arm.

"My dear Gontran, if the old man is reasonable and the analysis gives the results hoped for by Doctor Latonne, I shall probably have a shot at a big bit of business here: a watering-place. I want to start a watering-place."

He halted in the middle of the road and, holding his companion by the lapels of his coat, continued:

"Ah, you people do not realise what fun business is, not shopkeeping, or a merchant's business, but big business, our business! When you come to understanding it thoroughly, my dear boy, you find it includes everything that mankind has loved, it is simultaneously politics, war, diplomacy, everything, yes, everything, yes, everything! You must be always searching, finding, inventing; you must understand all, foresee all, combine every method, venture all. It is with money that the great battles of to-day are fought. I look on five-franc pieces as little privates in red breeches, on twenty-franc pieces as glittering lieutenants, on hundred-franc notes as captains, and thousand-franc notes as generals. And I fight, by God! I fight from morning till night against the whole world, with the whole world. That is living, living in the big way, like the tyrants of old. We are the tyrants of to-day, the real, the only tyrants! Look at this village, this poor village! I shall make a town of it, a white town, full of great hotels full of people, with lifts, servants, and carriages, a host of rich men served by a host of poor; and all because, one evening, I elect to fight with Royat on the right, Châtel-Guyon on the left, Le Mont-Dore, La Bourboule, Châteauneuf, and Saint-Nectaire at our backs, and Vichy in front of us.

And I shall succeed, because I possess the means, the only means. I saw the means in a flash, as plainly as a great general sees the enemy's weak wing. In our profession too a man must know how to lead men, inspire and dominate them. Lord! life is good fun when a man can do such things! My town will give me pleasure for three years to come. And look what luck I had in coming across that engineer, who spoke so admirably, yes, admirably, at dinner to-night. His system is as clear as daylight. Thanks to him, I can ruin the old company without even having to buy it out."

They had begun to walk again, and were slowly ascending the left-hand road towards Châtel-Guyon.

Gontran had been heard to say on occasion: "When I am near my brother-in-law, I can plainly hear in his head the same noise you hear in the gambling-rooms of Monte Carlo, the noise of gold being moved about, shuffled, raked in, scraped together, lost and won."

And, truly, Andermatt did give the impression of being a strange human machine, constructed solely for the calculation, agitation, and mental manipulation of money. He mingled, too, a large percentage of vanity with his professional knowledge, and boasted that he could estimate at a glance the precise value of any object. For which reason he was invariably seen — in whatever place he found himself — taking up some article, examining it, putting it back, and declaring: "That is worth so-and-so much." His wife and his brother-in-law, amused by this mania of his, delighted in deceiving him by showing him curious pieces of furniture and asking him to value them; and when he stood in perplexity before their extraordinary finds, they would both go into fits of laughter. Sometimes, too, in the street, in Paris, Gontran would stop him in front of a shop, and would force him to estimate the value of an entire windowful of goods, or of a lame

cab horse, or of a furniture-van with all the furniture inside.

One evening, at a big dinner-party at his sister's house, he ordered William to tell him the approximate value of the Obelisk; and when the banker had quoted some figure or other, he made the same inquiry with regard to the Solferino Bridge and the Arc de Triomphe. And he gravely concluded: "You might write a most interesting work on the valuation of the principal monuments of the globe."

Andermatt never lost his temper; he lent himself to every pleasantry, relying on his reputation for infallibility.

"And what am I worth?" Gontran had asked one day. William refused to reply; at last, when his brother-in-law insisted, asking: "Well, look here, if I were captured by brigands, what ransom would you pay for me?" he answered: "Well . . . well . . . I'd give them my note of hand, my dear." And there was so much meaning in his smile that the other, a little annoyed, left the subject alone.

Andermatt had, too, a great love for artistic trifles, for he had exquisite taste, an extraordinary knowledge of the subject, and great ability as a collector; he tracked down a good thing with the bloodhound instinct that served him in all commercial transactions.

They had arrived in front of a house of middle-class aspect. Gontran stopped him and said: "Here it is."

An iron knocker hung upon a heavy oaken door; they knocked, and a thin servant opened to them.

"Monsieur Oriol?" asked the banker.

"Come in," said the woman.

They entered the kitchen, a vast farm-house kitchen, where a small fire was still glowing under a pot; they were then conducted to another room in which the Oriol family was assembled. The old man was asleep, his

back in one chair, and his feet on another. The son was sitting with his elbows on the table, reading the "Petit Journal" with the violent concentration of a feeble and perpetually baffled mind, and the two daughters, in the embrasure of the same window, were working at opposite ends of the same piece of tapestry.

They were the first to rise, with a single movement, bewildered by this unexpected visit. Then the tall Jacques raised his head, confused with the struggling effort of his brain. Last of all, old Oriol woke up and drew in, one after the other, his long legs stretched out upon the second chair.

The room was bare, whitewashed, and with a tiled floor; it was furnished with cane chairs, a mahogany chest of drawers, four framed prints of *Épinal*, and large white curtains.

All stared at one another, and the servant, her skirt turned up knee-high, remained at the door, held there by curiosity.

Andermatt introduced himself and his brother-in-law, the Comte de Ravenel, made a low bow to the two girls, with a sweeping salute of the most extreme elegance; then calmly seated himself and proceeded:

"Monsieur Oriol, I have come to talk business with you. I will go straight to the point, which is this: You have recently discovered a spring in your vineyard. In a few days the water will be analysed. If it proves to be worthless, I shall naturally withdraw; if, on the contrary, it corresponds with my hopes, I propose to you that I should buy this plot of land and all the surrounding plots.

"Now, think of this. No one, absolutely no one else, could make you this offer. The old company is on the edge of bankruptcy, and will not think of building a new pump-room, and the failure of their enterprise will not encourage fresh experiments.

"Do not give me your answer to-day, but consult with your family. When the analysis is made known, you will fix your price. If it suits me, I shall say yes; if it does not suit me, I shall say no, and I shall go away. I never bargain."

The peasant, a business man in manner, and more acutely sensitive than most, replied politely that he would see, that he was honoured by the proposal, and that he would think it over, and he offered him a glass of wine.

Andermatt accepted, and, as the daylight was failing, Oriol turned to his daughters, who had returned to their work, their eyes lowered upon their task, and said:

"Bring a light, my girls."

They rose simultaneously, went into an adjoining room, and returned, one carrying two lighted candles, the other four cheap glass tumblers. The candles were new, adorned with pink paper sockets, doubtless kept as ornaments on the mantelpiece of the girls' room.

Then Colosse got up; for only the men were accustomed to go to the cellar.

Andermatt had an idea.

"I should like to see your cellar. You are the foremost vine-grower in the district, and it must be a very fine one."

Oriol, touched to the heart, was only too pleased to take them, and, seizing one of the lights, led the way. They went back through the kitchen and descended into a court-yard, where the remaining daylight revealed a glimpse of empty barrels standing upright; gigantic millstones rolled into a corner, with a hole through their centres, like the wheels of some colossal chariot of a by-gone age; a dismantled press with its wooden screws, its brown limbs varnished by long use and gleaming out of the darkness in the rays of the candle; and steel implements polished in the soil, glittering like weapons of

war. One after another, all these objects sprang into view as the old man passed in front of them, carrying his candle in one hand and shielding the flame with the other.

Already they could smell the wine, the crushed, dried grapes. They arrived at a door fastened with two locks. Oriol opened it and, suddenly, raising the light, gave them an indistinct view of a long line of casks, carrying on their bellying flanks another row of smaller barrels. First he demonstrated that this ground-floor cellar ran far into the mountain side; then he told them of the contents of the vessels, their age, their vintage, their merit. When finally he stood before the precious family vat, he caressed the cask with his hand as a man caresses the crupper of a favourite horse, and said, in a voice of pride:

"You shall taste this. There's no wine bottled to equal it, not one, neither in Bordeaux nor anywhere else."

For he had the countryman's passionate love for wine left in the wood.

Colosse, who followed carrying a jug, bent down and turned the spigot, while the old man carefully shed light on the operation, as though he were performing a difficult and finicky task.

The candle struck full upon their faces, the old man's lawyer-like countenance and his son's like that of a ploughboy recruit.

"What a fine Teniers, eh?" murmured Andermatt in Gontran's ear.

"I prefer the girls," whispered the young man in reply. Then they returned to the house.

And now they had to drink the wine, plenty of it, to please the two Oriols.

The girls had come to the table and were going on with their work as though no one were there. Gontran stared at them incessantly, wondering if they were twins,

they were so alike. One was, however, plumper and shorter, and the other more distinguished in appearance. Their hair, not black, but chestnut, was plastered in tight bands over their temples, and gleamed at each slight movement of their heads. They had the rather strong jaws and brows of the Auvergne race, and somewhat prominent cheekbones, but their mouths were charming, their eyes delightful, and their eyebrows exceptionally finely pencilled, and their complexions of delicious freshness. At the first glance it was plain that they had not been brought up in that house, but at a fashionable boarding-school, a convent to which the rich and aristocratic young ladies of Auvergne are sent, and that they had learnt there the discreet manners of society debutantes.

But Gontran, siezed with a violent distaste for the red glass set before him, kicked Andermatt's foot to induce him to leave. At last he rose, and they both shook hands energetically with the two peasants and bowed again ceremoniously to the two girls, who responded, this time without rising, by a slight movement of their heads.

As soon as they were out in the road, Andermatt began again:

“A strange household, aren't they? How plainly you can see in that family the transition from working-people to the world of fashion! The son, you see, was needed to work in the vineyards, to save the wages of a man, a stupid piece of parsimony — but, all the same, he was kept at home, and he is of the common herd. As for the daughters, they are already almost completely absorbed into the upper classes. If they make decent marriages, they will be every bit as good as any of our women, and a good deal better than most. I am as pleased to see these people as a geologist to find an animal of the tertiary age!”

“Which do you prefer?” asked Gontran.

"Which? What do you mean, which? Which what?"
"Which of the girls?"

"Oh, I don't know! I didn't look at them with an eye to comparison. But what is it to you? You aren't going to run off with one of them?"

Gontran burst out laughing.

"Oh, no, but I am delighted to come across fresh women for once in a way, really fresh, in a way women never are in our own circle. I enjoy looking at them just as you enjoy looking at a Teniers. There is nothing I like looking at so much as a pretty girl, never mind where she may be or of what class. They are my hobby. I am not a collector, but I have the passionate admiration of an artist for them, of a convinced and disinterested artist. I cannot help it; that is what I enjoy. By the way, you couldn't lend me five thousand francs, could you?"

Andermatt halted and murmured a fervent "What? Again?"

"Yes, always," replied Gontran simply, and they set off again.

"What the devil do you do with money?" asked Andermatt.

"I spend it."

"Yes, but you spend it to excess."

"My dear fellow, I am just as fond of spending money as you are of making it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, perfectly. But you don't make any."

"Quite so. I don't know how to. A man can't have everything. You know how to make it, for instance, but you have no idea how to spend it. Money seems to you to have no use except to accumulate interest. Now, I don't know how to make it, but I have excellent ideas on spending it. It procures me a thousand things you know only by name. We were made to be brothers-in-law. We are one another's perfect complements."

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"Cheeky young devil!" murmured Andermatt. "No, you shall not have five thousand francs, but I will lend you fifteen hundred . . . because . . . because I may need you in a few days."

"Then I'll take it on account," replied Gontran calmly.

The other tapped his shoulder, and made no reply.

They reached the park, that was lit up by lanterns hanging from the branches of the trees. The Casino orchestra was playing a slow classical air that seemed to limp on its way, falling constantly into abysses of silence; it was performed by the same four musicians, exhausted by their ceaseless playing, morning and evening, in this solitude, to the leaves and the stream, producing the effect of twenty instruments; and tired of never being paid at the end of the month, when Petrus Martel had devoured their substance on wine and spirits that never reached the patients.

Through the noise of the concert could also be heard that of a game of billiards, the crack of the balls and cries of "Twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two."

Andermatt and Gontran went upstairs. Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur and Doctor Honorat were the only visitors; they were sitting by the orchestra, drinking their coffee. Petrus Martel and Lapalme were playing their furious game, and the barmaid woke up and inquired:

"What would you like, gentlemen?"

IV

THE two Oriols talked together for a long time after the girls had gone to bed. Thrilled and excited by Andermatt's proposal, they tried to think of a way of inflaming his desire still more, without compromising their own interests. Being practical and careful-minded peasants, they weighed the different possibilities shrewdly, realising fully that, in a country where mineral springs issue from the banks of every stream, they must take care not to drive away this unexpected enthusiast by asking an excessive price, since they would never find his like again. Yet it was equally essential not to give him complete control over a spring that might one day run liquid money; the examples of Royat and Châtel-Guyon taught them this.

Accordingly they sought for methods whereby they might prick the banker's ardour to uncontrollable frenzy; they invented a tale of the machinations of fictitious companies outbidding him, and a series of other clumsy ruses which they knew to be weak, but were unable to think of anything better. They slept badly, and in the morning the old man, the first to awake, wondered if perhaps the spring had dried up in the night. It was, after all, quite possible that it had gone as it had come, that it had returned underground and become unattainable again. Stricken with all a miser's terrors, the old man rose in great uneasiness, woke his son, and acquainted him with his fear; tall Colosse thereupon dragged his legs from between the grey sheets and dressed to go out with his father to investigate.

In any event, they would clean up the vineyard and the spring itself, remove the stones and make all sleek and neat, like an animal they were going to take to market.

So they took their picks and spades and set off, side by side, with great swinging strides.

They took no notice of anything as they went: pre-occupied with the business in hand, they returned only monosyllabic replies to the greetings of neighbours and friends. When they were on the Riom road, they felt a stir of excitement, and peeped into the distance to see whether they could make out the water bubbling and glittering in the morning sun. The road was empty, white and dusty, and bordered in places by the river, which was shaded by willow-trees. Under one of these, Oriol suddenly caught sight of two feet; he took another three paces forward and recognised old Clovis, sitting at the edge of the road, his crutches laid down on the grass, one on each side of him.

He was an old cripple, famous throughout the country-side, where for ten years he had been wandering about painfully and slowly on his oaken legs, like a Bedlam beggar, as he said. Formerly a poacher in coverts and trout-streams, often caught and condemned, he had been smitten with aches and pains from long periods of lurking hidden in damp grass, and nocturnal fishing-expeditions to rivers in which he waded up to the waist in water. Now he moaned and crept about like a crab that had lost its legs. He went dragging his right leg behind him like a piece of rag, with his left leg doubled up beneath him. But the country lads who went out at dusk after girls or hares, used to say that they had seen old Clovis, swift as a stag and supple as an adder, under bushes and in copses, and that his rheumatism was mere dust thrown in the eyes of the police. Colosse in particular always insisted that he had seen him, not

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once, but fifty times, setting snares, with his crutches held under his arms.

Old Oriol halted opposite this ancient vagabond, seized with a sudden idea, vague as yet, for ideas were slow to ripen in his square Auvergne head.

He said good morning to him. "Good morning," replied the cripple. Then they talked of the weather, the vine blossom, and two or three other things; but Colosse had gone on ahead, and his father strode briskly on and caught him up.

Their spring was still running, now quite clear, and the entire bottom of the cavity was red, a fine dark red, caused by a plentiful deposit of iron.

The two men looked at each other with a smile, and presently set to work to clear the surrounding ground, removing the stones, which they piled up in a heap. And finding the last remains of the dead dog, they buried them, joking as they did it. But suddenly old Oriol let his spade fall. A sly wrinkle of joy and triumph creased the corners of his flat lips and the rims of his cunning eyes.

"Come and see," he said to his son.

The young man obeyed; they regained the road and retraced their steps. Old Clovis was still sunning his limbs and his crutches.

Oriol halted in front of him and asked:

"Would you like to make a hundred francs?"

The cripple, prudently, made no answer.

"What about it? A hundred francs?" repeated the peasant.

The vagabond made up his mind, and answered:

"By gum! Who wouldn't?"

"Well, then, old 'un, this is what you've got to do."

He went off into a long explanation, pointing out, with innumerable insinuations, implications, and repetitions, that if he would agree to bathe, for an hour, from

ten till eleven every day, in a hole which he and Colosse would dig beside the spring, and to be cured by the end of a month, they would give him a hundred francs in silver crowns.

The cripple listened with an air of bewilderment, and finally said:

"If all the physic in the world ain't cured me, your water won't."

But Colosse suddenly flared up:

"Come off it, you old humbug; I know what's the matter with you; you can't come it over me. What were you doing last Monday in Comberombe Wood, at eleven o'clock at night?"

"That's a lie," said the old man vigorously.

"And was it a lie, you old devil, that you jumped over Jean Mancellat's ditch, and went off down Poulin hollow?"

"It's a lie," repeated the cripple energetically.

"And it's a lie that I sang out: 'Hi! Clovis, the policeman!' and you went off down Moulinet's lane?"

"It's a lie!"

"Ah! it's a lie, is it?" cried big Jacques, furiously angry, almost threatening the cripple. "Listen to me, then, you old three-legged scoundrel; when I see you next, at night, in the woods or down by the river, I'll damn well lay you by the heels, for I've got longer legs than you, and I'll tie you up to a tree till morning, and we'll all go out, the whole blooming village, and take you back with us. . . ."

Old Oriol restrained his son, and said, quite gently:

"Listen, Clovis; you really might have a try. Colosse and me'll make you a bath, and you'll go and have one every day for a month. I'll give you two hundred francs, instead of a hundred, just for that. And then if you're cured at the end of the month, that'll be five hundred more. Five hundred, d'ye hear, in

silver crowns, with two hundred before, makes seven hundred.

“Two hundred, then, for a month’s baths, plus five hundred for a cure. Oh! and look here: aches and pains, they come back; but if you get ‘em again in the autumn, it doesn’t matter: the water will have done its work just the same.”

“In that case,” replied the old man calmly, “I’m willing. Even if it doesn’t succeed, a man can always try”

The three men shook hands to seal the bargain. Then the two Oriols returned to the spring in order to dig old Clovis’s bath for him.

They had been working for a quarter of an hour when they heard voices in the road.

It was Andermatt and Doctor Latonne. The two peasants winked at one another and stopped digging.

The banker came up to them and shook hands, then all four stared at the water in silence.

It was bubbling like water in a pot over a fire, throwing up its eddies and gases, and trickling away towards the stream along a shallow channel it had already carved out. Oriol, a smile of pride on his lips, said suddenly:

“There’s plenty of iron, eh?”

The bottom was indeed already red, and even the little pebbles washed by the outflowing water were covered with a sort of red mould.

“Yes,” replied Doctor Latonne, “but that means nothing; it is the other properties which must be known.

“Colosse and me each drank a glass last night,” replied the old peasant, “and it’s kept us fresh inside till this moment. Eh, son?”

“Aye, sure, it kept us fresh,” replied the young giant emphatically.

Andermatt stood motionless, his feet at the edge of the hole. He turned to the doctor.

“For the purpose I have in mind, we should need ap-

proximately six times as much water as this, should we not?" he asked.

"Yes, approximately."

"Do you think it is to be obtained?"

"Oh, I don't know!"

"Well, the purchase of the land cannot be definitely concluded until after the examination. First we must have a formal promise drawn up by a lawyer, stating that the sale is to take place as soon as the analysis is published, but only if the succeeding examinations give the result which we hope for."

Old Oriol grew uneasy. He did not understand. Andermatt accordingly explained to him the inadequacy of a single spring, and showed him that he could not actually buy one unless he found others. But he could not search for these other springs except after the signing of a promise to sell.

The two peasants promptly manifested every sign of a conviction that their fields were as full of springs as of vine-roots. There was no need to do anything but dig, and they would certainly come to light.

"Yes, we shall see," was all that Andermatt said.

But old Oriol moistened his hand in the water and declared:

"Damn it, it's hot enough to boil an egg, much hotter than Bonnefile's."

Latonne, in his turn, wetted his finger and admitted that it might be so.

"And it has more taste, and a better taste too," continued the peasant; "it doesn't smell wrong, like the other. I'll answer for it that it's good. I've watched these waters run for fifty years, and I know them! I've never seen better, never!"

He paused for a moment, and continued:

"It's not just for the sake of business that I tell you that; no, certainly not. I'd like to prove it to your eyes,

really prove it, not to any damned chemist, but on a sick man. I bet that stuff would cure a paralysed man, it's so hot and tastes so well, I bet it would."

He seemed to be ransacking his memory, and then to be gazing at the summit of the hills, searching for the desired cripple. Failing to find one, he let his gaze fall upon the road.

Two hundred yards away, on the edge of the road, the vagabond's two inert legs were to be seen; his body was concealed by the trunk of the willow-tree.

Oriol screened his eyes with his hand.

"Isn't that old Clovis still there?" he asked his son.

"Yes, yes, that's him," replied Colosse, with a laugh.

"He can't get away as quick as a hare."

Oriol advanced one pace nearer Andermatt, and said in a tone of profound and serious conviction:

"There, monsieur! There's a cripple over there, a paralysed cripple; doctor knows him well; a real cripple, who hasn't been seen to walk one step in the last ten years. Tell him, doctor."

"Oh, yes," affirmed Latonne; "if you cure him, I'll pay a franc a glass for your water."

He turned to Andermatt: "The old man has rheumatic gout; he's got a sort of spasmotic contraction of the left leg, and his right is completely paralysed; in fact, I believe him to be incurable."

Oriol had let him speak; but now he broke in, and went on slowly:

"Well, doctor, will you try it on him, for a month? I don't say it will succeed, I don't say anything: I only ask you to try. Colosse and me were going to make a hole for the stones; well, we'll make a hole for Clovis; he shall stew in it every morning for an hour, and we'll see, we'll see . . ."

"You can try," murmured the doctor. "I can promise you you won't succeed."

But Andermatt, attracted by the hope of an almost miraculous cure, welcomed the peasant's idea with delight; and all four returned towards the vagabond, still lying motionless in the sun.

The old poacher, understanding the ruse, pretended to refuse, and held out for a long time. At length he allowed his scruples to be overcome, on condition that Andermatt was to give him two francs a day for the hour he was to spend in the water.

Thus the business was settled. It was even decided that, as soon as the hole was dug, Clovis should have his bath that very day. Andermatt would supply clothes for him to put on after it, and the two Oriols would carry down an old shepherd's hut stored in their yard, so that the old cripple could change his clothes in it.

Then the banker and the doctor returned to the village. They separated at the entrance to the village, the latter returning to his consulting-room, the former waiting for his wife, who was coming to the pump-room about half past nine.

She appeared almost at once. Dressed in pink from head to foot, in a pink hat, with a pink sunshade, and a rosy face, she looked like the dawn; she walked straight down the short steep slope in front of the hotel, to avoid going round by the drive. She darted along like a bird that hops from stone to stone without spreading its wings, and, at sight of her husband, cried out:

“Oh, what a lovely place! I’m so happy!”

The few invalids wandering mournfully about the silent little park turned their heads at her passing; and Petrus Martel, smoking his pipe in his shirt-sleeves at the window of the billiard room, called his crony Lapalme, who was sitting in a corner before a glass of white wine.

“Demn it, laddie,” he said, clicking his tongue, “there’s a nice little bit of fluff.”

Christiane entered the pump-room, greeting the cashier on the left with a smile and the ex-jailer on the right with a spoken "good morning." Then, offering a ticket to a woman attendant clad like the attendant at the drinking-fountain, she followed her along the corridor containing the doors of the bathrooms.

She was introduced into one of these, a fairly large room, with bare walls, furnished with a chair, a mirror, and a shoehorn. A large oval hole, plastered with yellow cement, the colour of the soil, formed the bath.

The woman turned a key like those used to turn on the water in street hydrants, and the water poured in through a little round barred opening at the bottom of this tub, which was soon filled to the brim; the overflow was led off down a channel that passed through the wall.

Christiane, who had left her maid at the hotel, refused the assistance of the Auvergne peasant in undressing, and remained alone, saying that she would ring for towels or anything she might need.

She undressed slowly, looking at the almost imperceptible movement of the water swirling through the clean bath. When she was quite naked, she wetted her foot in it, and a pleasant sensation of warmth rose to her throat; then she plunged first one leg, then the other, in the water, and sat in the pleasant warmth of the transparent bath, in the spring that ran over her and about her, covering her body with little bubbles of gas, all up her arms and legs, and even on her breasts. She looked with surprise at these innumerable and exquisite little drops of air that clad her from head to foot in a complete armour of tiny pearls, little pearls rising perpetually up from her white flesh and evaporating at the surface of the bath, followed swiftly by fresh ones that sprang into life upon her body. They sprang to life upon her skin like rare fruit, divine, inapprehen-

sible fruit, the fruit of her cool pink dainty body, that made pearls grow in the water.

And Christiane felt so happy there, so sweetly, lightly, delicately caressed, embraced by the moving, living water stirred into life by the spring that poured into the bottom of the bath and escaped by the little hole in the corner of her cabin, that she would have liked to stay there always, without moving, almost without thinking. The sensation of a calm happiness born of rest and comfort, of a tranquil mind, health, sober joy, and silent merriment, ran through her with the exquisite warmth of the bath. And her spirit dreamed to the vague lullaby of the dripping overflow, dreamed of what she would do afterwards, of what she would do next day, of walks, of her father, her husband, her brother, and the tall youth who was somewhat in her mind since the adventure of the dog. She disliked strenuous people.

No desire ruffled her soul, calm as her heart in the warm water, no desire save the vague hope for a child, no desire for another life, for emotion or passion. She felt happy and contented.

She started in alarm; her door was being opened; it was the peasant woman bringing towels. Her twenty minutes were up; it was already time to dress. The awakening was almost a grief, almost a calamity; she wanted to ask the woman to allow her another few minutes, but reflected that the pleasure would return each day. Regretfully she left the water and wrapped herself in a hot towel that scorched her a little.

As she was going out, Doctor Bonnefille opened the door of his consulting-room and asked her to come in, bowing ceremoniously. He inquired after her health, felt her pulse, looked at her tongue, informed himself as to her appetite and digestion, questioned her as to whether she was sleeping well, and conducted her to the door of the room, repeating:

"Yes! Yes! Doing nicely, doing nicely. My kind regards, please, to your father, one of the most distinguished men I have met in the course of my career."

At last she escaped, already bored with his attentions; in front of the door she saw the marquis, talking to Andermatt, Gontran, and Paul Brétigny.

Her husband, in whose head any new idea buzzed restlessly, like a fly in a bottle, was telling the story of the cripple, and wanted to go back and see if the vagabond were having his bath. To please him, they went.

But Christiane quietly kept her brother behind and, when they were some little way from the rest, said:

"I say, I want you to talk to me about your friend; I don't care for him much. Tell me exactly what sort of man he is."

And Gontran, who had known Paul for several years, told her of his nature — passionate, brutal, sincere, and kind by fits and starts.

He was, he said, a young man of much intelligence, whose impulsive spirit pricked him into a passionate surrender to every caprice. Yielding to every impulse, not knowing how to master or direct his energies, nor how to oppose his feelings by his reason, nor how to govern his life by a methodical scheme founded on properly thought-out convictions, he obeyed his enthusiasms, whether admirable or detestable, as soon as any desire, thought, or emotion took possession of his uncompromising spirit.

He had already fought seven duels, being as prompt in insult as in reconciliation afterwards; he had been madly in love with women of all classes, adoring all of them with equal abandon, from the workgirl picked up on the steps of her shop to the actress literally kidnapped on the evening of a first performance, just as she was stepping into her landau to return home, carried off in his arms through the midst of the amazed bystanders,

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and thrown into a carriage which disappeared at a gallop, permitting no attempt at pursuit or recapture.

“There!” concluded Gontran. “A splendid fellow, but quite mad, very rich, and capable of absolutely anything under the sun when he loses his head.”

“What curious scent he uses!” replies Christiane. “It smells quite delightful. What is it?”

“I don’t know,” answered Gontran; “he won’t say. I believe it comes from Russia. The actress, his actress, the one I’m curing him of just now, gave it to him. It’s a jolly scent, isn’t it?”

On the road they could see an assemblage of patients and peasants, for it was the custom to go for a stroll along this road every morning before lunch.

Christiane and Gontran rejoined the marquis, Andermatt, and Paul, and soon they saw, on the spot where the landmark had still been standing the previous day, a human head, a weird object covered with a ragged remnant of grey felt, projecting from the ground, like a decapitated head growing there as though it were a plant. Bewildered vine-dressers were standing round it staring, their looks displaying no trace of amusement — the men of Auvergne are not given to humour — while three fat men from a second-rate hotel were laughing and joking.

Oriol and his son were standing looking at the vagabond soaking in his hole, sitting on a stone, with the water up to his chin. He might have been taken for some tortured wretch of an earlier day, condemned for some strange crime of sorcery; he had not let go of his crutches, which were submerged beside him.

“Bravo! Bravo!” Andermatt was repeating in delighted tones. “There’s an example that ought to be followed by all local sufferers from rheumatic aches and pains.”

He leant over the cripple and shouted at him, as though the man were deaf:

“Are you all right?”

The cripple, who seemed completely dazed by the scalding water, replied:

“I feel as though I were melting. It’s bloody hot!”

“The hotter it is, the more good it will do you,” declared old Oriol.

“What’s all this?” asked a voice behind the marquis, and Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur, still panting, stopped on the way back from his daily walk.

Then Andermatt unfolded his scheme for a cure.

But the old man kept repeating: “It’s bloody hot!” and was anxious to leave the water, begging for assistance to get him out of it.

Eventually the banker calmed him by promising him another franc for each bath.

There was a ring of people round the hole where floated the greyish rags that covered his old body.

“What a broth!” said a voice. “I wouldn’t care to soak a crust in it”; and another replied: “And the meat wouldn’t suit me, either.”

But the marquis noticed that the bubbles of carbonic acid gas seemed more numerous, larger, and more vigorous in this new spring than in that in the pump-room.

The vagabond’s tattered garments were covered with them, and the bubbles rose to the surface in such abundance that the water seemed laced with countless little chains, an infinite number of necklaces of tiny diamonds, the powerful sun in the clear sky making them as brilliant as jewels.

Aubry-Pasteur burst out laughing.

“Oh, Lord!” he exclaimed, “you really must hear what they did at the pump-room. As you know, a spring is caught like a bird, in a sort of trap, or rather a bell. This is called ‘capturing’ it. Now listen to what happened last year to the spring that supplies the baths.

The carbonic acid gas, being lighter than the water, collected at the top of the bell, and, when too large a quantity of it had been amassed there, it was forced back into the pipes; it rose again in vast quantities in the bathing-cabins, filling them and asphyxiating the patients. There were three accidents in two months. So I was called in again, and I invented a very simple mechanism, consisting of two pipes which led the water and the gas from the bell separately, and mixed them together again directly beneath the bath, thus restoring the water to its normal condition while avoiding the dangerous excess of carbonic acid gas. But my apparatus would have cost, roughly, a thousand francs. So do you know what our friend the ex-jailer did? You will never guess: he made a hole in the bell so as to get rid of the gas, which naturally escaped. With the result that they sell you acidulated baths with no acid, or at least with so little acid that it is hardly any use. Whereas here, just look at it!"

Everyone was most indignant! There was no more laughter, and envious eyes were cast upon the cripple. Every patient would gladly have taken up a pick and hollowed out a hole for himself beside the vagabond's.

But Andermatt took the engineer's arm, and they went off deep in conversation. From time to time Aubry-Pasteur halted and apparently drew a line with his cane, illustrating his points; the banker took notes in his memorandum-book.

Christiane and Paul Brétigny had begun a conversation. He was telling her of his visit to Auvergne, what he had seen and felt. He loved the country with an instinctive passionate delight which had always something of the animal in it. He loved it as a sensual man whom it excited, a man whose nerves and senses were thrilled by it, would love it.

"As for me," he was saying, "I feel as though I were

wide open, as it were, so that every experience can enter me, and pass through me, making me cry or gnash my teeth. For instance, when I look at that slope opposite, that great green fold, that crowd of trees climbing up the mountain, the whole wood is in my eyes; it pierces me, invades my being, runs in my blood; I feel as though I were eating it, as though it were filling my stomach; I become a wood myself."

He laughed as he said this, turning his great round wide eyes, now upon the wood, now upon Christiane. She, surprised, astonished, but naturally impressionable, felt herself also devoured, like the wood, by his wide, hungry eyes.

"And if only you knew," continued Paul, "what pleasure I owe to my nose! I drink this air, I intoxicate myself with it, I live on it, and I smell absolutely everything that is in it. I'll explain what I mean. First of all, have you noticed, since you have been here, a delightful fragrance to which no other can be compared, it is so faint, so exquisite, that it seems almost . . . how shall I express it? . . . an immaterial odour? You find it everywhere, but can apprehend it nowhere; you cannot discover where it comes from. Nothing more . . . more divine had ever disturbed my heart. . . . It is the scent of the blossoming vines . . . Oh, it took me four days to discover that! And isn't it a charming thought that the vine which gives us wine — understood and appreciated only by epicures — should give us also the most delicate and troubling of perfumes, to be enjoyed only by the most refined of sensualists? And can you not recognise, too, the powerful scent of the chestnut-trees, the honeyed fragrance of the acacias, the aromatic trees of the mountains? And the grass, how good it smells, how good, how good, everyone can appreciate that!"

She was amazed by these remarks; not that they were

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surprising in themselves, but they seemed so different from the things she heard spoken around her every day that they captivated, stirred, and disturbed her mind.

He was still speaking, in his rather low but warm voice:

“Yes, and can you also recognise, in the air, on the roads, when it is warm, a faint flavour of vanilla? You can, can’t you? . . . Well, it is . . . it is . . . I hardly like to tell you.”

He was now laughing outright, and suddenly he stretched out his hand, saying:

“Look!”

A line of carts loaded with hay was advancing towards them, drawn by cows yoked two by two. The slow animals plodded wearily along, their foreheads low-hung, their heads bowed by the yoke, their horns bound to the wooden crosspiece; under their heaving skin the bones of their legs could be seen in motion. Before each wagon walked a man in his shirt-sleeves, wearing a black hat and waistcoat, with a stick in his hand, regulating the pace of the animals. From time to time he would turn round and, without ever striking the animal, touch the shoulder or the forehead of a cow; the animal blinked its great dreaming eyes and obeyed his gesture.

Christiane and Paul drew aside to let them go past.

“Can you smell it?” he asked.

“What?” she asked in surprise. “There is a smell of cowsheds.”

“Yes, there is; and all these cows going about the country — for there are no horses here — fill the roads with that smell of cowsheds; it mixes with the fine dust and gives to the air a flavour of vanilla.”

“Oh!” murmured Christiane, slightly disgusted.

“Forgive me,” he replied; “for the moment I was a chemist making an analysis. At all events, we are in the most seductive, sweetest, most restful country I

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have ever seen. A country of the golden age! And the Limagne, oh, the Limagne! But I won't talk about it, I want to show it to you. You shall see!"

The marquis and Gontran rejoined them. The marquis took his daughter's arm; he turned her round to make her walk back for lunch, and said:

"Listen, children, this concerns all three of you. William, who goes quite mad when he has an idea, thinks of nothing but the town he intends to build, and wishes to entice the Oriol family. He wants Christiane to make the acquaintance of the daughters, to see if any use can be made of them. But the father must not suspect our plan. So I had an idea: we will get up a charity fête. You, Christiane, are to go and see the priest; the two of you will find two of his women parishioners to go about and help you. You understand, of course, which two you will get him to recommend, and he will invite them on his own responsibility. As for you men, you will organise a tombola at the Casino, with the help of Petrus Martel, his company, and his orchestra. And if the Oriols are nice girls — and they are said to have been well brought up in their convent — Christiane will conquer their hearts."

V

FOR eight days Christiane was entirely occupied in preparations for this fête. The priest had not found among his parishioners anyone but the two Oriol girls fit to go round begging with the daughter of the Marquis de Ravenel; pleased at being thrust into a position of prominence, he had arranged all the preliminary details, and had himself invited the two girls, as if he had been responsible for the idea from the beginning.

The town was excited, and the melancholy patients, now in possession of a new topic of conversation, bombarded one another at meals with varying estimates of the receipts that might be expected from the two performances, sacred and profane.

The great day began well. It was perfect summer weather, warm and bright, scorching hot on the plain and delightful under the trees in the village.

Mass was at nine, a short choral celebration.

Christiane, who had arrived before the service in order to have a glimpse of the church decorations, consisting of garlands of flowers sent from Royat and Clermont-Ferrand, heard footsteps behind her; the priest, the abbé Litre, was following her, accompanied by the Oriol girls; he performed the introductions. Christiane promptly invited the girls to lunch. They accepted, blushing and curtsying.

The pious worshippers were beginning to arrive.

The three women sat down on three chairs of honour, which had been set for them at the side of the choir,

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facing three others occupied by three boys in their Sunday best, the sons of the mayor, the deputy mayor, and a municipal councillor. They had been chosen to accompany the women in their work of collecting money, and in order to flatter the local dignitaries.

Everything went off very well.

The service was short. The collection produced a hundred and ten francs, which, added to Andermatt's five hundred, the marquis's fifty, and Paul Brétigny's hundred, made a total of seven hundred and sixty, a record for Enval.

After the ceremony the Oriol girls were taken to the hotel. They seemed a little shy, but quite free from awkwardness, and hardly opened their mouths, out of modesty rather than nervousness. They lunched at the big hotel table, and the men were, all of them, delighted with the two girls.

Though the elder was serious, and the younger more lively, the elder more "correct," in the familiar sense of the word, and the younger more naturally gracious, they resembled one another as closely as two sisters can.

As soon as the meal was finished, they all went over to the Casino for the drawing of the tombola, which was to take place at two o'clock.

The park, already overrun by a mingled throng of patients and country folk, wore the aspect of a travelling fair.

In their Chinese kiosk the musicians were playing a pastoral symphony, a work by Saint-Landri himself. Paul, who was walking with Christiane, stopped and said:

"Why, that's very pretty. The fellow has talent. With a full orchestra it would be very effective. Are you fond of music?" he asked her.

"Very."

"It simply devastates me. When I hear a work I

love, the first strains seem to strip my skin from my flesh, melt and dissolve it to nothingness, leaving me like a man flayed alive, a prey to the assault of the instruments. And it is on my nerves that the orchestra plays, on my naked, quivering nerves, that vibrate at every note. I hear the music not merely with my ears, but with every last ounce of feeling in my body, quivering from head to foot. Nothing gives me such pleasure, or rather such happiness."

"You are very sensitive," she said with a smile.

"What is the good of living, without sensibility? I do not envy those who wear the shell of a tortoise or the hide of a hippopotamus about their hearts. Only those are happy who suffer through their sensations, feeling their onslaught like electric shocks, and enjoying their flavour like delicacies. For we must savour all our emotions, joyful or sorrowful, sate and intoxicate ourselves with them, whether they lead to the most intense happiness or the most acute misery."

She stared at him, surprised, as she had been for the past week, by the things that he was saying.

For in the space of a week this new friend — he had become her friend at once, despite her first few hours of dislike of him — was constantly shaking the tranquillity of her soul, disturbing it as the surface of a pond is disturbed when stones are thrown into it. He was indeed throwing stones, large stones, into her still slumbering mind.

Christiane's father, like all fathers, had always treated her as a little girl who must not be told anything of importance; her brother made her laugh and not think; her husband did not imagine that a man ought to talk to his wife about anything beyond the topics of ordinary life; and until the present moment, she had lived in a pleasant and contented apathy of mind.

This new-comer was opening up her mind with in-

tellectual shocks that were like the blows of a hatchet. He was, too, one of those men who, by their very natures, by the quivering intensity of their emotions, appeal strongly to all women. He knew how to talk to them, how to tell them everything and make them understand it. Incapable of sustained effort, but exceedingly intelligent, always passionate in his loves and hatreds, always speaking with the single-minded intensity of a man of overwhelmingly strong convictions, as changeable as he was enthusiastic, he had the real feminine temperament to an excessive degree, the credulity, charm, variability, and nervous tension of a woman, together with the superior, active, open, and penetrating intelligence of a man.

Gontran hurriedly rejoined them.

"Turn round," he said, "and have a look at the Honorat family."

They turned round, and observed Doctor Honorat, flanked by a stout old lady in a blue dress; her head looked like a nurseryman's garden, every variety of plant and flower being represented on her hat.

"Is that his wife?" asked Christiane in surprise. "Why, she's fifteen years older than he is!"

"Yes, she's sixty-five; a retired midwife with whom he fell in love between two of her professional engagements. I gather that the couple squabble from morning till night."

They began to retrace their steps towards the Casino, drawn thither by the uproar of the crowd. The tombola prizes were displayed on a large table in front of the pump-room, and Petrus Martel, assisted by Mademoiselle Odelin of the Odéon, a very small dark woman, was drawing and announcing the numbers, affecting the pompous accents of a circus showman, at which the crowd was greatly amused. The marquis reappeared, accompanied by the Oriol girls and Andermatt.

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"Are we going to stay here?" he asked. "It is terribly noisy."

It was decided that they should go for a walk along the road half-way up the hill, that ran from Enval to La Roche-Pradière.

In order to reach it, they first climbed, in Indian file, a narrow path through the vineyards. Christiane went in front, walking with her swift, graceful strides. Since her arrival she felt as though endowed with a new form of existence; she felt something like a sharp awareness of happiness and life, such as she had never known before. Perhaps the baths, improving her health and ridding her of the slight disorders of those organs that are, insensibly, the cause of worry and melancholy, were granting her a larger measure of perception and enjoyment of all things. Or was it, perhaps, merely that she felt animated and excited by the presence and the enthusiasm of the strange youth who was teaching her to understand?

She drank in the air in long, deep breaths, thinking of all that he had said concerning the perfumes wafted on the wind. "It is quite true," she thought; "he did really teach me to smell the air"; and she recognised all the scents, especially that of the vines, so delicate, faint, and fugitive.

She came out on the road, and they formed various groups. Andermatt and Louise, the elder Oriol, went off first, talking of the fertility of the Auvergne soil. The Auvergne girl was her father's daughter; endowed with the hereditary instinct, she was familiar with all the details of vine-growing; modestly and pleasantly she spoke of them, in the genteel accent taught her at the convent.

All the while he listened, he was gazing at her, finding great charm in this grave young girl, already so well instructed in practical affairs.

"What!" he remarked occasionally, in mild surprise;

"land in the Limagne is worth as much as thirty thousand francs a hectare?"

"Yes, monsieur, when planted with good apple-trees yielding dessert apples. It is our district which supplies almost all the fruit eaten in Paris."

He turned and regarded the Limagne with fervent appreciation, for from the road on which they were walking they could see the vast plain, on the far horizon, still covered with a faint mist of blue vapour.

Christiane and Paul had stopped also to gaze at the immense, shrouded country-side, so pleasant to their eyes that they might have stayed there staring at it indefinitely.

The road was sheltered at this point by enormous nut-trees, whose opaque shade laid a cool caress on the skin. It rose no higher, but twisted along half-way up the hill-side that below them was carpeted with vines and, above, with short green turf right to the summit that just here was not very lofty.

"Beautiful," murmured Paul; "tell me, is it beautiful? And why, why does this landscape so move me? Its charm is so deep, so broad — yes, broad — that it pierces my heart. When you look at that plain, your mind seems to spread its wings, doesn't it? And it soars away, fluttering away to the far distance, to all the lands you dream of and will never see. Yes, that is it; we marvel at the view just because it is much more like a thing dreamed of than a thing seen."

She listened to him in silence, waiting and hoping, gathering in every word he spoke; she knew that her heart was stirred, but only vaguely knew why. She caught glimpses of other lands, those rosy elfin lands, fabulous and wonderful, undiscoverable, yet always sought, beside which all others seem to us commonplace.

"Yes," he continued, "it is beautiful because it is itself beauty. Other views are more striking, and less

harmonious. Ah, beauty, the beauty of harmony! It is the only thing in the world. Nothing exists but beauty! But how few understand it! The form of a body, of a statue, of a mountain, the colour of a picture or of that plain, the mysterious something about the Gioconda, a phrase which pierces you to the soul, that little more which makes an artist as creative as God, who is there among men who can discern it?

“There are two verses of Baudelaire’s which I will tell you.” And he recited:

“Que tu viennes du ciel ou de l’enfer, qu’importe,
O Beauté, monstre énorme, effrayant, ingénue,
Si ton œil, ton souris, ton pied m’ouvre la porte
D’un infini que j’aime et n’ai jamais connu!

“De Satan ou de Dieu qu’importe, ange ou sirène,
Qu’importe si tu rends — fée aux yeux de velours,
Rhythme, parfum, lueur, o mon unique reine —
L’univers moins hideux et les instants moins lourds.”

Christiane was watching him now, astonished at his lyricism, questioning him with her eyes, not really understanding what extraordinary idea the poem might yet hold.

He guessed her thoughts and was angry with himself for not having communicated his exaltation to her, for he had recited the verses very well.

“It was foolish of me,” he said, with a shade of contempt in his voice, “to try and force upon you a taste for a poet of such subtle ideas. A day will come, I hope, when you will feel these things as I do.

“Women, who are endowed with far more intuition than understanding, cannot apprehend the veiled and secret purposes of art unless a sympathetic appeal is first made to their minds.”

He bowed, and added:

“I shall try to make that sympathetic appeal.”

She thought him strange, not impertinent; besides, she was not even trying to understand, for she had been suddenly struck by a fact she had not noticed before: he was very well dressed, but his figure was too tall and strong, his bearing too virile for one to perceive the exquisite taste of his clothes at the first glance.

And there was something brutal and unfinished about his head, giving at first sight a vague impression of clumsiness to his whole person. But when his features had become familiar, their charm became apparent, a powerful rough charm that could become very tender, following the soft inflexions of his always low voice.

"Yes," said Christiane to herself, noticing for the first time how perfectly groomed he was from head to foot, "he is certainly one of those men whose good qualities have to be discovered one by one."

But just then Gontran ran up to them, shouting:

"Hi! Christiane, wait for me!"

"Oh," he laughed, when he had caught them up, "do come and listen to the youngest Oriol girl, she is so funny, really frightfully witty! Father managed to put her at her ease, and she's telling us the most amusing stories you ever heard. You must wait."

They waited for the marquis, who came up with the younger girl, Charlotte Oriol.

With childish wit and glee she was telling stories of the village, of the unsophisticated or cunning ways of the country folk. And she imitated them, their gestures, their slow walk, their grave speech, their obscene oaths, which she mispronounced, imitating all the movements of their faces in a way that lent extraordinary charm to her own pretty, lively face. Her merry eyes shone; her mouth, which was not small, opened wide, showing her beautiful white teeth; her slightly turned-up nose gave her an irresistible air; and she was cool, with a flower-like coolness such as set the lips quivering with desire.

The marquis had spent almost his whole life upon his lands, and Christiane and Gontran, brought up on the family estate amid the proud, stout Norman farmers who came, according to the custom of the day, to occasional meals, and whose children went to the same confirmation class and were on familiar terms with them, knew how to talk to this country girl, already three parts the fine lady, with friendly frankness and unwavering tactful cordiality, to which she immediately responded with perfect assurance, gaiety, and trust.

Andermatt and Louise were walking back, having reached the village and not wishing to go right into it, and they all sat down at the foot of a tree, on the grass at the roadside.

They remained there some time, talking quietly of everything in general and nothing in particular, in a torpid languor of physical contentment. From time to time a cart would go by, always drawn by a pair of cows, their heads bowed and twisted by the yoke, and always led by a lean, stooping peasant in the inevitable big black hat, directing his beasts with the tip of his thin stick, with the gestures of the conductor of an orchestra.

The man would take off his hat in greeting to the two Oriols, whose girlish young voices returned a friendly "good afternoon" to him.

At last, as it was getting late, they went back.

As they drew nearer, Charlotte Oriol exclaimed:

"Oh! the *bourrée!* the *bourrée!*"

It was indeed the *bourrée*, danced to an old Auvergne air.

Peasant lads and girls were walking and dancing, making movements of courtesy, turning and bowing; the women holding up their skirts by the finger and thumb of each hand, the men's arms swinging or a-kimbo like the handles of a vase.

The sweet, monotonous refrain danced too in the cool evening wind; always the same phrase sung in a shrill

tone by the violin, while the other instruments marked the rhythm, giving to the lilt of the tune a pulsating insistent note. It was good, simple country music, lively and artless, according well with the rather awkward movements of the rustic minuet.

The patients also were trying to dance. Petrus Martel was capering about opposite the little Mademoiselle Odelin, who was as full of artificial airs and graces as a ballet girl; Lapalme the comedian was performing an extravagant burlesque of the dance round the cashier from the Casino, who seemed excited by memories of the Bullier ball.

But suddenly Gontran observed Doctor Honorat, who was putting all his soul and all his legs into the dance, performing the classical *bourrée* like a real old thoroughbred son of Auvergne.

The orchestra ceased playing. All stopped. The doctor came forward and greeted the marquis, wiping his brow and breathing hard.

“It’s good,” he said, “to be young at times.”

Gontran put his hand on his shoulder, and smiled maliciously.

“You never told me you were married,” he said.

The doctor stopped mopping his forehead, and answered gravely:

“Yes, I am, and a bad job too.”

“I beg your pardon.”

“I said, my marriage is a bad job. Never commit that particular brand of folly, young man.”

“Why not?”

“Why not! Well, I’ve been married twenty years, and I’m not used to it yet. Every evening when I get home, I say to myself: ‘Hallo! That old lady’s still in the house. Isn’t she ever going to leave?’”

They all burst out laughing, he spoke with such an air of seriousness and conviction.

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But the hotel bells were ringing for dinner. The fête was over. Louise and Charlotte Oriol were conducted back to their father's house, and after their departure the others talked about them.

Everyone thought them charming. Andermatt was the only one who preferred the elder sister.

"How pliable is the nature of woman!" said the marquis. "The mere neighbourhood of their father's gold, whose uses they are not even aware of, has transformed these country girls into ladies."

"And which do you prefer?" Christiane asked Paul Brétigny.

"Oh, as for me," he murmured, "I did not even look at them. It is not they whom I prefer."

He had spoken very softly; and she did not answer.

THE days which followed were very pleasant for Christiane Andermatt. Her heart was light and her soul full of joy. The morning bath was her first pleasure; its touch on her skin was a delight, an exquisite half-hour of running warm water that disposed her to happiness all through the day. She was truly happy in all her thoughts and all her desires. The affection by which she felt herself surrounded and penetrated, the intoxication of youth pulsing in her veins, was arousing new emotions in her, as also was the new setting of her life, this wonderful land, made for rest and dreaming, broad and fragrant, folding her in nature's wide embrace. Everything that came near her, everything that touched her, but carried on the emotions roused by the morning bath, a deep bath of happiness into which she dived, body and soul.

Andermatt, who was to spend every other fortnight at Enval, had returned to Paris, telling his wife to make sure that the cripple did not stop his treatment.

Every day, therefore, before lunch, Christiane, her father, her brother, and Paul would go and see what Gontran called "the poor man's broth." Other patients went too, and they would gather round the pool in a circle and talk to the beggar.

He was not walking any better, he said, but his legs felt full of ants; he told them how these ants came and went, ascending to his thighs and descending again to the tips of his toes. Even at night he felt the insects, tickling and stinging him, and preventing him from falling asleep.

All the visitors and peasants, divided into two camps, the believers and the unbelievers, took an interest in the treatment.

After lunch Christiane would often seek out the Oriol girls and go for a walk with them. They were the only women in the place with whom she could converse, with whom she could be pleasantly familiar, to whom she could give some measure of confidential friendship, and from whom she could command feminine affection. From the first she had been attracted by the smiling serious common sense of the elder sister, and still more by the younger's wit and humour, and it was less from obedience to her husband's request than for her own pleasure that she made friends with the two girls.

They went on little expeditions, sometimes on foot, sometimes by carriage, in an old landau, holding six people, that they found in a livery stable at Riom.

They were particularly fond of a wild little valley near Châtel-Guyon, leading to the hermitage of Sans-Souci.

Two and two they would walk and talk, going slowly along the narrow path, under the pine-trees, beside the little stream. At every crossing (for the path was continually crossing the river) Paul and Gontran, standing on stones in mid-stream, would each take their ladies by the arm, swing them up, and deposit them on the other side. And always at each of these fords they changed partners.

Christiane went from one to the other, but managed on each occasion to remain for some time alone with Paul Brétigny, either ahead of the rest or behind them.

His manner towards her had changed since their first meetings; he was less hasty, less of a mocker, less of a comrade, more respectful, more ardent.

But their conversations acquired a certain intimacy, and love became a prominent topic. He spoke of emotion and passion as a man who knew the subjects, who

had sounded the hearts of women and owed them as much happiness as suffering.

Christiane, delighted, and not unmoved, drove him on, with her burning and subtle curiosity, to confide in her. All that she knew of him roused in her a keen longing to know more, to penetrate, by her brain, into one of those lives of men that she glimpsed in books, one of those tempestuous lives full of the mysteries of love.

At her bidding he told her every day a little more of his life, his adventures, and his sorrows, with a warmth of speech sometimes raised to passion by the smouldering fires of memory, but kept discreetly effective by his desire to please.

He revealed a world unknown to her, finding eloquent words wherewith to express the subtleties of desire and expectation, the havoc wrought by growing hopes, the religion of flowers, ribbons, and all the trifles preserved by the lover, the exasperation of uncertainty, the anguish of alarming thoughts, the tortures of jealousy, and the inexpressible madness of the first kiss.

And he was well aware of the best way in which to describe all this, the veiled, poetical, fascinating way. Like all men perpetually haunted by the desire and idea of women, he spoke with reserve of those he had loved with a fever that was not yet cooled. He recalled a thousand pretty details that would stir the heart, a thousand exquisite little circumstances that would moisten the corners of the eyes, and all those delicate gallantries that make the love-affairs of aristocratic and cultured people the most elegant and charming thing in the world.

All these disturbing and intimate talks, renewed every day, and every day more prolonged, fell upon Christiane's heart like seed upon the soil.

And the charm of the open country, the soft air, the

blue Limagne, so broad that it seemed to enlarge the soul, the extinct craters, the world's ancient hearths which now had no function but to heat water for invalids, the cool shade, the faint sound of the brooks chattering over the pebbles, all penetrated the heart and body of the young woman, softening them like warm, gentle rain falling on virgin soil and bringing to blossom the flowers whose seed has been already planted.

She was well aware that the young man was in some sense making love to her, that he thought her pretty, and more than pretty; and the desire to please him supplied her with a thousand ideas, cunning and simple at the same time, for his seduction and conquest.

When he became emotional, she would leave him suddenly; when she was aware that some tender remark was on his lips, she would fling him, before the sentence was ended, one of those quick, profound glances that strike like a flame into the hearts of men.

She had delicate little turns of speech, gentle movements of the head, vague gestures of the hands, and melancholy looks quickly ended by a smile, all of which showed him, without actually telling him, that his efforts were not wasted.

What did she want? Nothing. What was she expecting? Nothing. She took pleasure in this game simply because she was a woman, because she was unaware of the danger of it, because, without having any presents, she wanted to see what he would do.

For within her had suddenly wakened the instinct for coquetry that lurks in the veins of every feminine being. The child wrapped yesterday in innocent slumber had suddenly awakened, strong and intelligent, in the presence of this man who was always talking to her of love. She divined his growing distress of mind in his eyes, and understood the various inflexions of his voice with the sharp intuition of a woman who feels her love demanded.

Other men had made love to her in drawing-rooms without receiving anything but the derision of a jolly schoolgirl. The banality of their compliments amused her; their doleful sighs provoked her laughter; to all their manifestations of emotion she replied with absurd pranks.

But with this man she felt herself suddenly opposed to an attractive and dangerous adversary, and she had become this adroit, instinctively keen-sighted being, armed with audacity and presence of mind, who would lie in wait for men and take them in the invisible net of emotion, while her heart remained free.

As for Paul, he had at first thought her silly. Accustomed to adventuresses as practised in love as an old soldier in parade-ground drill, expert in all the ruses of gallantry and affection, he found this simple soul commonplace, and treated her with faint disdain.

But little by little her very candour had first amused him, then won his heart; yielding to his impulsive nature, he had begun to lavish attentions upon her.

He was well aware that the best way of exciting a pure mind was to be constantly speaking of love while appearing to think of it in connexion with other people; pandering astutely to the delicate curiosity he had aroused in her, he had set to work, under the pretext of confiding in her, to give her, in the shade of the woods, a liberal education in the technique of love.

Like Christiane, he took pleasure in the game, showing her, by all the little attentions known to men, his growing liking for her, and posing as a lover without yet imagining that he would become one in reality.

Throughout their long, slow walks, each of them played this game as naturally as a man bathes when he finds himself beside a river on a hot day.

But from the moment when the real instinct for coquetry revealed itself in Christiane, from the moment

when she revealed all the natural skill of a woman in attracting men, when she conceived the idea of reducing this lover to his knees, much as she might have undertaken to win a game of croquet, the young profligate became sincere, allowed himself to be caught by her innocent ways, and began to love her.

He became awkward, uneasy and nervous; and she began to treat him as a cat does a mouse.

With another woman he would not have been embarrassed; he would have spoken, and conquered her with his fiery impetuosity; with her he did not dare, so different did she seem from all the women he had known.

The rest, in general, were women whose wings had been already singed by life; he could say anything to them, could venture the boldest request, murmuring lip to lip the quivering words that fire the blood. He knew himself, felt himself to be irresistible when he was free to communicate to the soul, to the heart, to the senses of the beloved, the headlong desire that consumed him.

But in Christiane's presence he felt as though he were with a young girl, so inexperienced she seemed; and all his usual methods were paralysed. He began to love her in a new way, as a child, and a betrothed. He desired her, yet he was afraid to touch her, to soil her, to wither her. He did not want to crush her in his arms like the other women, but to kneel and kiss her dress, kiss, with infinitely chaste deliberation and gentleness, the tiny hairs of her temples, the corners of her mouth, and her eyes, her closed eyes whose lovely blue depths he could feel under the lowered eyelids. He would have liked to protect her against everyone and everything, not to let her be jostled by the vulgar or see the ugly or approach the unclean. He would have liked to remove the mud from the roads and the stones from the paths on which she walked, the brambles and branches from the

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woods in which she wandered, to make all about her delightful and easy, and to carry her always, so that she need never set foot to the ground. It exasperated him that she had to talk to her neighbours at the hotel, eat the undistinguished hotel food, and undergo all the unavoidable little discomforts of life.

He did not know what to say to her, he thought so much of her; powerless to tell her in words the emotions of his heart, to do any of the things he would have liked to do, or let her know the devouring necessity of devoting himself to her that ran through his veins like fire, he looked at times like a wild beast chained up, and felt a strange longing to burst into tears.

All this she saw without entirely understanding it, and took pleasure in it with the heartless gaiety of all coquettes.

When they remained behind the others and she felt by his manner that he was on the point of saying something disturbing, she would suddenly run after her father and, when she had caught him up, exclaim: "How about a game of puss-in-the-corner?"

Games of puss-in-the-corner marked the limits of all their walks. They would find a clearing in a wood or a wide strip of road and play like school-children out for a walk.

The Oriol girls and Gontran delighted in this pastime, which satisfied the incessant desire to run about common to all young people. Paul Brétigny, obsessed by other thoughts, was the only one who grumbled, but, growing gradually more lively, he ended by playing with more vigour than the rest in order to take Christiane and touch her, and put his hand for a moment upon her shoulder or her breast.

The marquis, whose indifferent and careless nature lent itself to any plan that did not disturb his rest, would sit at the foot of a tree and watch, as he said, his

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boarders at play. He found the peaceful life very pleasant, and the whole world quite perfect.

But Paul's ways soon began to alarm Christiane. One day she was really afraid of him.

They had gone one morning with Gontran to the end of the strange gorge whence flowed the Enval river, and which was called the End of the World.

The valley, growing ever narrower and more tortuous, lost itself in the depths of the mountains. They passed huge rocks, crossed over the little stream by means of the huge boulders in its bed, and, after rounding a rock more than fifty metres high, barring the inner cleft of the ravine, they found themselves enclosed in a sort of narrow pit, between two gigantic walls of stark rock crowned with trees and verdure.

The stream formed a tiny pool no bigger than a wash-basin; it was a wild, strange place, indeed, outside the bounds of common expectation, seeming to belong to romance rather than to real life.

On this particular day Paul, gazing at the high ramp of rock that barred their way at the place where all visitors were accustomed to stop, noticed that it bore traces of a stairway.

“Why, we can go further,” he said.

With considerable trouble he climbed up this perpendicular wall.

“Oh,” he exclaimed, “it's beautiful — a little wood in the water! Come and look!”

He lay down and took hold of Christiane's hands, hauling her up while Gontran set her feet on the little ledges of the rock.

The soil that had fallen down from above had formed upon this shelf of rock a wild, wooded little garden, and the stream flowed amid the roots of the trees.

Another ramp of rock a little farther on once more blocked this granite corridor; they climbed it, and then

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a third, and found themselves at the foot of an impassable wall down which for twenty metres a clear, straight cascade fell into a deep pool which it had hollowed out, buried under a tangle of creepers and branches.

The cleft in the mountain had become so narrow that the two men, holding hands, could touch the sides of it. A mere thread of sky was visible; no sound could be heard but the babbling of the water; the place was like one of the ever-hidden retreats wherein Latin poets concealed the nymphs of an earlier day. Christiane felt as though she had wandered into a faery habitation.

Paul Brétigny did not speak. Gontran exclaimed:

“Oh, how pretty it would be to see a fair-haired, pink-skinned woman bathing in the water!”

They went back. The first two shelves were fairly easy to descend, but the third frightened Christiane, it was so high and steep, and no steps were visible.

Brétigny slid down the rock and held out his arms to her.

“Jump!” he said.

She dared not. Not that she was afraid of falling, but she was afraid of him, afraid, above all, of his eyes.

He was gazing at her with the avidity of a hungry animal; his passion blazed up, and his arms extended towards her beckoned so imperiously that she was suddenly terrified, and had an insane desire to scream, to run away, to climb straight up the mountain, anything to escape that irresistible appeal.

“Off you go!” cried her brother, standing behind her, and pushed her. Feeling herself falling, she shut her eyes and, caught in a strong, gentle embrace, felt, unseeing, all the tall body of the young man, whose hot, panting breath was on her face.

Then she found herself on her feet once more, smiling, now that her fear was over, while Gontran descended.

The excitement of that moment made her prudent,

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and she was careful, for several days, not to be left alone with Brétigny, who seemed to prowl round her like the wolf in the fables round the lamb.

But a great expedition had been decided upon. They were to take provisions with them in the landau and go and dine, accompanied by the Oriol girls, on the shores of the little lake of Tazenat, locally known as the Tazenat gourd, returning home by moonlight.

They went off one very hot afternoon, under a blazing sun that scorched the granite rocks to a heat like the floor of an oven.

Three panting, sweating horses drew the carriage up the hill at a walking pace; the driver dozed on his box, his head lolling on to his chest, and legions of green lizards ran among the stones at the roadside. The torrid air seemed filled with an invisible, heavy dust of fire. At times it seemed almost rigid and solid, resisting their passage, at times it stirred a little, sending across their faces hot gusts of air, bearing the scent of warm resin as they went through the great pine woods.

No one in the carriage spoke. The three women had closed their dazzled eyes, under the pink shadow of their sunshades; the marquis and Gontran were asleep, with handkerchiefs over their foreheads; Paul was looking at Christiane, who was observing him from beneath her lowered eyelids.

The landau persisted along the interminable ascent, raising a column of white dust.

When at last it reached the plateau, the coachman sat up, the horses broke into a trot, and they passed through a broad undulating landscape, wooded and cultivated, dotted with villages and solitary houses. Far away on the left could be seen the huge truncated peaks of the volcanoes. The lake of Tazenat, for which they were bound, was formed by the last crater in the Auvergne range.

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“Look, lava!” said Paul suddenly, after three hours of travel. Brown, strangely twisted rocks pierced the surface of the soil at the roadside. On the right was visible a snub-nosed mountain whose broad summit looked hollow and flat. They took a road that seemed to strike right into it, through a triangular cleft, and Christiane, sitting up, suddenly found, in a huge, deep crater, a beautiful cool lake, as round as a silver coin. The steep slopes of the mountain, wooded on the right and bare on the left, descended to the water, encircling it in a lofty, regular girdle. The calm water, flat and gleaming like metal, reflected the trees on one side and the barren slope on the other with such perfect clarity that the eye could not distinguish its edges; all that was visible in this vast funnel, in whose heart the blue sky was reflected, was a clear, bottomless cavity that seemed to cleave right through the earth to the firmament on the other side.

The carriage could go no further. They got out and followed a path on the wooded side that skirted the lake, under the trees, half-way up the slope. This path, only used by wood-cutters, was as green as a meadow; through the branches they could see the slope opposite and the water gleaming at the bottom of this natural mountain basin.

They descended to the shore through a clearing in the trees, meaning to sit down on a bank of turf shaded by oak-trees. They all lay down in the grass in a divine unreasoning contentment.

The men rolled in it, digging their hands into it, and the women, lying comfortably on their sides, laid their cheeks against it as though to seek its cool caress.

After the heat of the road, this gave them one of those pleasant sensations so profoundly satisfying that they are almost a happiness in themselves.

The marquis went to sleep again, and Gontran soon

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followed his example; Paul, Christiane, and the girls began to talk. Of what? Of nothing very serious! From time to time one of them would utter a sentence and another would reply after a minute of silence, and the words in their mouths were as drowsy and lethargic as the thoughts in their minds.

But the driver had carried up the basket of provisions, and the Oriols, accustomed to household duties in their own home, and still retaining the energetic habits of domestic labour, promptly set to work unpacking it and preparing dinner a little further on, on the grass.

Paul remained lying beside Christiane, who was in a brown study. He murmured, so softly that she could scarcely hear, the words brushing lightly past her ears like the vague sounds borne on the wind: "These are the best moments in my life."

Why did these non-committal words disturb her to the depths of her being? Why did she feel suddenly more moved than she had ever been before?

Through the trees, a little further on, she could see a little house, a shooting or fishing-lodge, so small that it could not contain more than one room.

Paul followed her eyes, and said:

"Have you ever thought what two people, madly in love, might make of a few days spent in a hut such as that? They would be alone in the world, truly alone, face to face. And if such a thing were possible, should one not leave all in order to realise it — happiness is so rare, brief, and elusive? Does one really live in the ordinary days of life? What is sadder than to get up in the morning with no burning hopes at heart, calmly accomplish the same tasks, drink in moderation and eat with discretion, and sleep at night like an animal, in perfect tranquillity?"

She was still gazing at the little house, and her heart swelled within her as though she were on the brink of

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tears, for suddenly she had caught a glimpse of rapture such as she had never imagined.

Yes, it would be good for two to be alone together in that tiny dwelling hidden in the trees, facing that toy lake, that jewel-like lake, a true mirror of love! It would be good, with no one near, without a neighbour, with no human voice in earshot, without a sound from the world, alone with a man she loved, who would spend hours at the knees of his loved one while she gazed at the blue water, and who would kiss her finger-tips and murmur words of love.

They would live there in the silence, under the trees, in the depths of the crater that would hold all their passion as it held the deep, limpid water, in its fast-closed even girdle, with no horizon to their eyes save the curved line of the hill, with no horizon to their minds save the happiness of loving one another, with no horizon to their desire save slow and endless kisses.

Were there on earth any who could attain such days of bliss? Yes, assuredly! And why not? How had she never realised before that such happiness was attainable?

The girls announced that dinner was ready. It was already six o'clock. The marquis and Gontran were awakened, and they all went on a little further and sat down cross-legged by the plates that slid about on the turf. The two sisters continued to do the work, and the careless men did not interfere with them. They ate slowly, throwing fruit-peel and chicken-bones into the water. They had brought champagne with them, and the sudden report of the first cork flying out startled everyone, it seemed so strange in this place.

The day was ending; the air was tinged, as it were, with coolness; with the coming of evening a strange melancholy fell upon the water slumbering at the bottom of the crater.

When the sun was almost gone, the sky burst out in radiant flame-colour, and the tarn was changed to a bowl of fire; then, when the sun was set, the horizon grew red like a dying brazier, and the tarn was changed to a bowl of blood. And suddenly, over the crest of the hill, the moon rose, almost full, pale in the yet undarkened firmament. Then, as the darkness spread over the earth, it mounted, shining and round, over the crater as round as itself. It seemed as though it must fall into it. And when it was high in the heavens, the tarn was changed to a bowl of silver, and little shivers, now slow, now swift, ran across its surface that all day long had lain motionless. It was as though ghosts were flitting just above the surface of the water, trailing invisible veils over it.

It was the big fish from the depths, centenarian carp and voracious pike, coming up to play by moonlight.

The Oriols had replaced all the plates and bottles in the basket. The driver came to fetch it, and they started homewards.

Christiane was walking down the path, under the trees, through whose leaves patches of moonlight fell on to the grass like pools of rain; she was walking last but one, followed by Paul, and suddenly she heard a panting voice saying, almost into her ear: "I love you! — I love you! — I love you!"

Her heart began to beat so furiously that she could not move her limbs, and nearly fell! But she went on walking. On she walked, her head in a whirl, ready at any moment to turn round with outstretched arms and parted lips. He had grasped the edge of the little scarf over her shoulders, and was frantically kissing it. She went on walking, so near to fainting that she could no longer feel the ground under her feet.

Suddenly she came out from under the vault of trees, and, finding herself full in the moonlight, she quickly

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mastered her distress. But before she entered the carriage and the lake was lost to sight, she turned half round and with both hands threw a kiss towards the water; the man following her understood.

During the drive back she remained inert in mind and body; dazed and shaken as though she had had a bad fall. As soon as they reached the hotel, she went quickly upstairs to her room. When she had thrust home the bolt, she turned the key in the lock, so strong was the feeling that she was still followed and desired. Then she stood trembling in the middle of the empty, darkened room. The candle on the table threw across the walls flickering shadows of furniture and curtains. Christiane collapsed into an arm-chair. All her thoughts were running, leaping, and rushing through her head; she could neither grasp, retain, nor connect them. She felt on the point of crying, now, without knowing why, wretched, broken-hearted, abandoned in the empty room, lost in life as in a forest.

Where should she go? What should she do?

Finding it difficult to breathe, she got up, opened the window and the shutter, and leaned on the sill. The air was cool. In the depths of the immense, empty sky the distant moon, solitary and sad, risen now to the blue-black heights of the night, poured a hard cold light upon trees and mountains.

The whole land was asleep. Only the faint singing of the violin of Saint-Landri, who practised very late every night, wailed in the profound silence of the valley. Christiane could hardly hear it. It stopped and began again, the thin, mournful crying of taut strings.

And the moon lost in the deserted sky, and the faint sound lost in the dumb night, burdened her heart with such a sense of loneliness that she began to sob. She shivered and trembled to the depths of her being, shaken with the anguished quaking of one suffering from a

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deadly fever; and suddenly she perceived that she too was alone in life.

She had not realised it till that day, and now she felt it so keenly in the distress of her soul that she thought she had gone mad.

She had a father! A brother! A husband! She loved them and they loved her. And now of a sudden she was far away from them, as much a stranger to them as though she hardly knew them. Her father's calm affection, her brother's friendly comradeship, her husband's cold tenderness, were as nothing to her now, nothing! Her husband! He was her husband, that pink, talkative man who asked her, without any real interest: "How are you this morning, my dear?" She belonged to him, body and soul, by virtue of a legal contract. Was it possible? — Oh, how lonely and lost she felt! She had closed her eyes, so as to look inside herself, into the depths of her thoughts.

And she saw, as she called them to mind, the figures of all those who lived about her: her calm, careless father, happy so long as his rest was not disturbed; her sceptical brother, always chaffing; her busy husband, his head a mass of figures, telling her: "I brought off a good thing to-day," when he might have said: "I love you!"

Another man had murmured that to her, not long ago, and it was still vibrating in her ears and her heart. She saw him too, devouring her with his steady eyes, and if he had been near her now, she would have flung herself into his arms!

VII

CHRISTIANE, who had gone to bed very late, woke just as the sun was pouring a flood of red-gold light into her room, through the wide-open window.

She looked at the time — five o'clock — and remained lying on her back in her warm bed, a delicious sensation. It seemed to her, so alert and joyous did she feel at heart, as though some great and wonderful happiness had happened to her during the night. What was it? She sought for it, trying to think what glad tidings had so filled her with joy. All her melancholy of the evening had disappeared, melted during sleep.

Paul Brétigny loved her! How different from that first day he appeared to her now! Despite all her efforts to remember, she could not recollect him as she had first seen and judged him, could not in the slightest degree recollect the man her brother had introduced to her. The man of to-day had retained nothing from this other man, neither face nor manner, nothing; for the first vision of him had passed away, little by little, day by day, by all the slow modifications applied by another's mind to a man seen, had become a man known, then familiar, lastly loved. The mind, unquestioning, acquires him hour by hour, acquires his features, his movements, his attitudes, his physical and moral nature. He enters into you, into your eyes and heart, by his voice, by his gestures, and by his words and thoughts. You absorb him and understand him, divining the essential man beneath the surface of his smile and speech;

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and finally it seems as though he belonged entirely to you, such is your love, as yet unconscious of itself, for all that is his and all that comes from him. And so it is impossible to recall how this man appeared to your indifferent eyes the first time that you saw him.

Paul Brétigny loved her. The fact aroused in Christiane neither fear nor anguish, but a profound compassionate affection, an immense, new, exquisite pleasure, that of being loved and knowing it.

But she was a little uneasy as to the manner he would assume in her presence and she retain in his. But as it pricked her conscience even to think of such matters, she ceased to deliberate, trusting to his skill and astuteness to direct events. She went downstairs at the usual time, and found Paul smoking a cigarette at the door of the hotel. He bowed respectfully to her:

“Good morning, madame. How are you this morning?”

“Very well, monsieur,” she replied with a smile; “I slept wonderfully well.”

She offered him her hand, not without a fear that he would hold it too long. But he barely touched it, and they began a quiet conversation, as though they had both forgotten what had happened.

The day went by, and he did nothing to remind her of his ardent avowal of the day before. During the days that followed, he remained equally calm and discreet, and she learnt to trust him. He had guessed, she supposed, that he would hurt her if he grew bolder; she hoped and firmly believed that they had stopped at that delightful stage of affection at which two can love and gaze into each other’s eyes with no regrets to come, being without spot of sin.

She was careful, however, never to stray far from the others in his company.

One evening, the Saturday of the same week during

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which they had gone to the Tazenat gourd, the marquis, Christiane, and Paul were returning to the hotel, at about ten o'clock, having left Gontran playing *écarté* with Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur, Monsieur Riquier, and Doctor Honorat in the great hall of the Casino. Brétigny exclaimed, as he saw the moon peering through the branches:

"How lovely it would be to go and see the ruins at Tournoël on such a night as this!"

At the mere thought of it Christiane was excited, moonlight and ruins having the same effect upon her as upon almost all women.

She squeezed the marquis's hand.

"Oh, papa, if only you would come!"

He hesitated, for he desired nothing so much as to go to bed.

"Think of it!" she persisted. "Tournoël is so beautiful even by day! You were saying yourself that you had never seen so picturesque a ruin, with that great tower above the house. What must it not be like at night?"

"Very well, we will go," he consented at last; "but we will look for just five minutes and come back at once. I want to be in bed by eleven."

"Yes, we will come back at once. It will not take us more than twenty minutes to get there."

The three set off together, Christiane leaning on her father's arm and Paul walking by her side.

He spoke of his travels, of Switzerland, Italy, and Sicily. He related the impressions made on him by certain scenes, his excitement on the summit of Monte Rosa, when the sun, rising above the horizon formed by the throng of frozen crests, in the still world of eternal snows, threw upon each giant peak a dazzling white light, kindling them like those pale lighthouses that must illumine the kingdom of the dead. Then he re-

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counted his feelings on the edge of the monstrous crater of Etna, when he felt like an immaterial animal, three thousand metres up in the clouds, with naught but sea and sky about him, the blue sea below, the blue sky above, leaning over this horrible mouth of the earth, stifled by its breath.

He elaborated his stories in order to excite Christiane; she listened to him with a quickened pulse, herself perceiving, in a transport of the imagination, the great things that he had seen.

Suddenly, at the fork in the road, they came in sight of Tournoël. The ancient house, upright on its hill, dominated by its high, slender tower, pierced with loopholes for light and dilapidated by time and ancient wars, lifted its dark mass strangely against the ghostly sky.

All three halted in amazement.

“Yes,” said the marquis at last, “it really is very lovely; like one of Gustave Doré’s dreams come true. Let us sit down for five minutes.”

And he sat down on the grass at the roadside.

But Christiane, wildly enthusiastic, exclaimed:

“Oh, Father, let us go a little further. It is so beautiful, so lovely! Please, please let us go up to the foot of it!”

But this time the marquis refused.

“No, darling, I have walked far enough, I can go no further. If you want to have a nearer view, go with Monsieur Brétigny. I will wait here for you.”

“Will you come, madame?” asked Paul.

She hesitated, a prey to two fears: one, of being alone with him; the other, of hurting the feelings of a charming man by appearing to be afraid of him.

“Off you go,” said the marquis; “I will wait for you.”

Then she realised that her father would be in earshot, and resolutely she replied:

"Let us go, monsieur."

They departed side by side.

But she had not been walking more than a few minutes before she felt herself overcome by a poignant feeling of vague mysterious terror, terror of the ruin, terror of the night, terror of the man. Her legs suddenly grew limp, as they had on that other evening by the lake of Tazenat; they refused to carry her any further, bending beneath her and seeming to sink into the road; her feet were held to the ground when she tried to lift them.

A large tree, a chestnut, planted at the roadside, put the corner of a meadow in shadow. Christiane, breathless as though she had been running, leant against the trunk.

"I am stopping here . . ." she faltered; "we can see very well from here."

Paul sat down beside her. She heard his heart beating, short, hurried strokes. After a brief silence he said:

"Do you believe that we have lived before?"

She was too excited to understand his question properly.

"I do not know," she murmured; "I have never thought about it."

"I believe it . . ." he went on, ". . . sometimes . . . or rather I feel it. . . . A human being, composed as he is of a soul and a body, which seem distinct from each other, but are doubtless of the same nature, must reappear when the elements which once formed him are combined together the second time. He is admittedly not the same individual, but he must be the same man returned to life, when a body like the previous body is inhabited by a soul similar to that which inhabited it before. And this evening I, for one, am sure that I have lived in that old house, that I owned it, that I fought in it, that I defended it. I recognise it; it was mine, I am

certain. And I am certain, too, that in it I loved a woman who was like you and whose name was also Christiane! I am so certain of it that I seem to see you again, calling to me from the top of that tower. Search your mind and try to remember! There is a wood, behind, which descends into a deep valley. We often used to walk in it. You wore thin draperies on summer nights, and I wore heavy armour which rang under the leaves.

“Don’t you remember? Think hard, Christiane! Your name is as familiar to me as those one hears in childhood! If you searched the stones of that castle, you would find it carved there by my hand in the days of old! I swear that I recognise my home, my land, just as I recognised you when first I saw you.”

He spoke with lofty conviction, in a poetic frenzy wakened by the woman, the night, the moon, and the ruin.

Suddenly he sank on to his knees before Christiane, and said in a trembling voice:

“Let me worship you again, now that I have found you. I have been looking for you so long!”

She tried to rise and go back to her father; but she had not the strength, nor the courage; she was held back, paralysed by an ardent longing to hear the ravishing words sink into her heart. She felt herself transported into a dream, the dream she had always desired, so sweet and romantic, full of moonlight and ballades.

He had taken her hands, and was kissing the tips of her finger-nails, stammering:

Christiane . . . Christiane . . . take me . . . kill me . . . I love you . . . Christiane . . . !”

She felt him tremble, quivering at her feet. He was kissing her knees now, sobbing deep down in his breast. She was afraid lest he might go mad, and rose to run from him. But he had risen more quickly than she,

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and had taken her in his arms and bent fiercely to her mouth.

Without a cry, without a struggle, without any resistance, she let herself fall back upon the grass, as though his embrace had broken her back as well as her will. And he took her as easily as though he were picking a ripe fruit.

But he had scarcely loosed his embrace when she rose and fled, bewildered, suddenly shivering and ice-cold, like one who had just fallen into a river. He caught her in a few strides and seized her by the arm, murmuring: "Christiane, Christiane! . . . be careful of your father."

She walked on, without answering or turning her head, going straight forward, with stiff, jerky steps. He was following her now, and did not venture to speak to her.

As soon as the marquis saw them, he rose.

"Let us hurry," he said; "I was beginning to feel cold. This sort of thing is very beautiful, no doubt, but bad for the cure."

Christiane huddled close to her father, as though to ask his protection and take refuge in his affection.

As soon as she reached her room, she undressed in a few seconds and got into bed, burying her head under the sheets. Then she burst into tears. For a long time she wept, inert, abject, burying her face in the pillow. She no longer thought about anything; she did not suffer, nor regret. She wept without thinking, without reflecting, without knowing why. She wept instinctively, just as one sings when happy. Then, when she had cried herself out, exhausted by her tears, she fell asleep out of sheer weariness.

She was awakened by gentle knocking at the door of her room, which led out of their sitting-room. It was broad daylight, nine o'clock. "Come in!" she cried, and her husband appeared, gay and lively, wearing a travel-

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ling-cap and carrying at his side the little money-bag that never left his grasp during a journey.

“What, still asleep, my dear!” he exclaimed. “And I have awokened you! I came in without sending in my name, you see! I hope you’re well; the weather’s wonderful in Paris.”

He took off his cap and went up to kiss her.

She recoiled towards the wall, seized with a mad, nervous terror of the pink, happy little man who was thrusting his lips towards her.

Then, suddenly, she offered him her forehead and closed her eyes. He kissed it without emotion, and asked:

“Do you mind if I have a little wash in your bathroom? As I wasn’t expected to-day, my room was not made ready.”

“Of course you may,” she stammered.

He vanished through a door at the foot of the bed.

She heard him moving about, splashing and whistling; then he shouted:

“Any news here? I’ve excellent news. The analysis of the water has given even better results than I hoped. We shall be able to cure at least three more diseases than they can at Royat. It’s splendid!”

She was sitting up in bed, fighting for breath, her head in a whirl at his unexpected return, which stabbed her like a sharp pain and held her in a feeling like remorse. He reappeared, very happy, smelling strongly of verbena. He sat down in a friendly way on the foot of the bed.

“And how is the cripple getting on?” he inquired. “Is he beginning to walk yet? It’s impossible that he should not derive some benefit from what we have found in the water.”

She had for several days forgotten all about him.

“Why . . .” she faltered, “I . . . I believe he is be-

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ginning to improve. . . . I haven't seen him this week. . . . I . . . I've not been very well. . . ."

He looked at her with an expression of interest.

"Yes, you are rather pale," he answered. "It suits you very well. . . . You look charming . . . quite charming . . ."

He went closer to her and, leaning over her, tried to put his arm into the bed, under her waist.

But she recoiled with such an air of terror that he paused in bewilderment, with outstretched hands, and mouth thrust forward.

"What is the matter with you? You won't let yourself be touched! I promise I'm not going to hurt you. . . ."

And he came closer, eager, his eyes aflame with sudden desire.

"No," she stammered, "let me alone . . . let me alone. . . . It's . . . it's . . . I think . . . I think I am going to have a baby! . . ."

She had spoken in a frenzy of terror, without thinking what she was saying, in order to escape his touch, as she might have said: "I have leprosy or the plague."

He turned pale, deeply moved with joy, and merely murmured: "Already!" He longed to kiss her now, give her the long, gentle, and tender kiss of a happy, grateful father. Then a dismaying thought came into his head.

"Is it possible? . . . How could it be? . . . Do you think . . . ? . . . So soon? . . ."

"Yes, it is possible! . . ." she replied.

He skipped about the room.

"Lord! Lord!" he exclaimed, rubbing his hands. "This is a happy day indeed!"

There was another knock at the door. Andermatt opened it, and a maid said:

"Doctor Latonne would like to speak to you at once."

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"Right. Show him into our sitting-room. I am just coming."

He returned to the next room. The doctor entered at once. His face was solemn, and his manner formal and cold. He bowed, touched the hand offered him by the rather astonished banker, sat down, and began his explanations in the tone of a second in a duel.

"I have had, my dear sir, a very disagreeable experience, which I must relate to you in order to explain my behaviour. When you did me the honour of consulting me about Madame Andermatt, I paid my visit immediately; now I understand that, a few minutes earlier, my confrère, the inspecting medical officer, who is doubtless better thought of by Madame Andermatt, had been called in by Monsieur the Marquis de Ravenel. The result is that, as the second comer, I am in the position of appearing to have acquired from Doctor Bonnefille by trickery a patient who was already entrusted to his care, to have committed an ungentlemanly act and been guilty of inexcusable behaviour towards another member of my profession, which calls for the utmost care and tact to avoid embroilments that may have serious consequences. Now Doctor Bonnefille, learning of my visit here, and believing me guilty of this lack of breeding — for appearances are admittedly against me — has spoken of it in such terms that, were he a younger man, I should consider myself compelled to demand satisfaction from him. There is only one course open to me, if I am to clear myself in his eyes and those of the entire medical fraternity of the neighbourhood; it is, much to my regret, to cease attending your wife, and to make known the whole truth of the matter, requesting you to accept my apologies."

"I quite understand your awkward situation, doctor," replied Andermatt, with some embarrassment. "The blame should be laid neither upon myself nor my wife,

but on my father-in-law, who called in Monseur Bonnefile without letting me know. Could I not fetch your colleague and tell him?"

"It is useless, my dear sir," interrupted Doctor Luttonne. "The matter is a question of professional honour and etiquette which I must respect before all things, and, in spite of my keenest regret . . ."

Andermatt cut him short in his turn. The rich man, the man who was in the habit of doing the paying, and of buying a thing for five, ten, twenty, or forty francs as though it were a three-halfpenny box of matches, who was, by the power of his purse, the potential owner of anything he saw, and whose appreciation of people and things was based solely upon a comparison of their value with that of money, upon a hasty and direct relation established between minted metal and everything else in the world, was offended by the arrogance of this dealer in paper remedies.

"Very well, doctor," he said stiffly; "let us leave it at that. But I hope that this affair will not have a prejudicial influence upon your career. The future will show us which of the two of us will suffer most from your decision."

The doctor rose, hurt.

"It will be myself, monsieur," he replied, bowing ceremoniously; "I have no doubt of that. What I have done is in every way distressing to me, even to-day. But I never hesitate between my interests and my conscience."

He took his departure. Just as he was passing through the door, he bumped into the marquis, coming in with a letter in his hand.

"Look here, my boy!" exclaimed Monsieur de Ravenel, as soon as he was alone with his son-in-law. "Here's a very annoying thing has happened to me, and it's your fault. Doctor Bonnefile, hurt because you consulted

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his confrère about Christiane, has just sent me his bill, with a very curt note to warn me that I cannot rely upon his services any more."

Thereupon Andermatt completely lost his temper. He marched up and down, gesticulating, and the more he talked, the angrier he grew, filled with harmless, trumped-up rage, of the sort which no one ever takes seriously. He shouted his arguments. — After all, whose fault was it? Entirely the marquis's, who had called in that stuffed dummy Bonnefile without even telling Andermatt, who, thanks to his Paris doctor, was well informed of the relative value of the three charlatans of Enval!

And, besides, what business was it of the marquis's to consult a doctor behind the back of the husband, who was the sole judge of his wife's health and was alone responsible for it? It was always the same thing; everybody was always doing some damn foolishness or other. He was always saying so, but he cried aloud in the wilderness; no one would realise it or be convinced by his experience until it was too late.

And he said "my doctor," "my experience," in the authoritative tone of a man whose possessions are unique. The possessive adjectives took on a metallic sonority in his mouth, and when he referred to "my wife" it was made very evident that the marquis no longer had any privileges in his daughter, seeing that Andermatt had married her, marrying and buying being identical in meaning in his opinion.

Gontran came in at the height of the dispute and sat down in an arm-chair, an amused smile on his lips. He did not speak, but merely listened, enjoying himself tremendously.

When the banker paused for lack of breath, his brother-in-law held up his hand, saying:

"Let me speak. You are both doctorless now, aren't you? Well, I propose my candidate, Doctor Honorat,

the only one with a precise and unshakable opinion about the Enval water. He makes you drink it, but he wouldn't drink it himself for anything in the world. Shall I go and fetch him? I'll undertake all the negotiations."

It was the only course to take, and Gontran was asked to bring him at once. The marquis, distressed at the idea of a change in regimen and medical attendance, was anxious to have the new doctor's advice at once, and Andermatt was not less eager to consult him about Christiane.

Through the door the latter could hear them without straining her ears and without understanding what they were talking about. As soon as her husband had left her, she had fled from her bed as from a place of terror and hastily dressed, without a maid, her head in a whirl with all these happenings. The world around her seemed a changed place, life another thing since yesterday, and even her own people entirely different.

Andermatt's voice rose once more:

"Why, Brétigny, my dear chap, how are you?"

Already he had stopped addressing him as "Monsieur."

"Very well, Andermatt," replied another voice. "You arrived this morning, then?"

Christiane, who was pinning up her hair at her temples, stopped, choking, her arms still upstretched. She imagined them shaking hands, on the other side of the wall. She sat down, unable to remain on her feet; and her loosened hair fell down again about her shoulders.

Paul was speaking now, and she quivered from head to foot at every word that fell from his mouth. Every word, whose meaning she could not catch, fell and rang upon her heart like a hammer striking on a bell.

Suddenly she murmured, almost out loud: "Why, I love him . . . I love him!" as though she had discovered a new, amazing fact that saved and consoled her, and justified herself to her conscience. A sudden wave of

energy brought her to her feet again, and in a second her mind was made up. She went on doing her hair, murmuring: "I have a lover, that is all; I have a lover." Then, in order to strengthen herself still more and free herself completely from torment of mind, she suddenly determined, with burning conviction, to love him with frantic intensity, to give him her whole life and happiness, to sacrifice everything to him, in accordance with the high morality of the conquered but unashamed heart that imagines itself purified by devotion and sincerity.

She threw him kisses, from behind the wall that separated them. It was finished; she abandoned herself to him, unreservedly, as one offering herself to a god. The child, already a clever coquette, but still timid and trembling, had died suddenly within her, and the woman was born, ready for passion, resolute and tenacious, apparent hitherto only in the energy hidden in the blue eyes that gave an air of courage, almost of bravado, to her fair delicate face.

She heard the door open, but did not turn round, divining her husband's entry without seeing him, as though a new sense, almost an instinct, had just blossomed in her.

"Shall you be ready soon?" he asked. "We are going to the cripple's bath presently, to see if he is really better."

"Yes, Will dear, in five minutes," she replied calmly. But Gontran entered the sitting-room and called Andermatt back.

"What do you think?" he said. "I met that idiot Honorat in the park, and he says he won't attend you either; he's afraid of the others. He talked about manners, professional etiquette, custom. . . . Anyone might suppose that . . . it would look as though he . . . In fact, the man's a fool like the other two. I really did think he would not be such an ass."

The marquis was thunder-struck. The thought of taking the waters without medical direction, of bathing for five minutes too long or drinking one glass too few, tormented him with terror, for he believed that all the doses, times, and phases of the treatment were precisely regulated by a law of Nature, who had had invalids in her mind when she invented mineral waters, and whose mysterious secrets were all known to doctors, her inspired and learned priests.

“So a man can die here . . .” he moaned; “die like a dog; and none of these gentlemen will inconvenience themselves on his account!”

The selfish, furious rage of a man whose health is threatened took hold of him.

“Have they the right to do that? The blackguards pay the registration tax, just as grocers do. It ought to be possible to force them to attend patients, in the same way that trains are forced to carry all those who wish to travel. I shall write to the papers about it.”

He walked up and down in agitation and, turning towards his son, continued:

“Listen, we shall have to send for one to Royat or Clermont! We can’t stay like this! . . .”

“But the doctors of Royat and Clermont are not familiar with the Enval water,” replied Gontran, laughing. “It has not the same action as theirs upon the digestion and the circulation. And you can be sure, too, that they will also refuse to come, lest they should appear to be eating the thistles from under their fellow donkeys’ noses.”

“But what is to become of us, then?” stammered the frightened marquis.

Andermatt took up his hat.

“Leave it to me,” he said. “I’ll answer for it that by to-night we shall have all three — yes, all three — at our feet. And now let us go and see the cripple.”

At his shout of "Are you ready, Christiane?" his wife appeared at the door, very pale, with a determined expression. She kissed her father and her brother; then, turning to Paul, offered him her hand. He took it, with lowered eyes, trembling in an ecstasy of excitement.

As the marquis, Andermatt, and Gontran were going out, engaged in conversation and taking no notice of them, she levelled at the young man a steady gaze of love and determination, and said firmly:

"I belong to you, body and soul. From now onwards, do with me as you will."

Then she went out, leaving him no time to reply.

As they drew near the Oriols' spring, they perceived, like an enormous mushroom, old Clovis's hat. He was dozing in the sun, in the hot water at the bottom of his hole. He now spent his whole mornings there, for he had grown used to the scalding bath that made him, he said, as skittish as a bridegroom.

Andermatt woke him with a "Well, my lad, getting better?"

The old man made a grimace of pleasure as he recognised his "gentleman."

"Yes, yes, getting on, getting on all right."

"Have you begun to walk?"

"Like a rabbit, monsieur, like a rabbit. Why, I'll dance the *bourrée* with my best girl the first Sunday of next month."

Andermatt felt his heart beat.

"You're really walking?" he asked again.

Old Clovis stopped jesting.

"Oh, not very well, not very well! Never mind, I'm getting on!"

Whereupon the banker was eager to see at once how the cripple walked. He walked round and round the hole in great agitation, giving orders, as though salving a sunken ship.

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"Now, Gontran, take his right arm — you, Brétigny, the left arm. I'll hold him up by the small of the back. Now, all together — one — two — three — My dear father-in-law, haul on that leg — no, the other, the one still in the water. — Quick, please, I can't hold on any longer! Now we're ready — one — two — that's done it — phew!"

They had seated the poor man on the ground; he stared at them with a bantering expression on his face, and did not assist their efforts in the least.

Then they lifted him up again and set him on his legs, giving him his crutches, which he used as though they were sticks. He began to walk, bent double, dragging his feet, and groaning with pain. He crawled on like a slug, leaving behind him a long trail of water on the white dust of the road.

Andermatt, wildly enthusiastic, clapped his hands and shouted: "Bravo, Bravo, wonderful, bravo!!!" as though applauding an actor at a theatre.

Then, as the old man appeared to be exhausted, he dashed forward to hold him up, taking him in his arms, although his clothes were streaming with water.

"That is enough, don't tire yourself," he said; "we are going to put you back in the bath."

And old Clovis was thrown back into his hole by the four men; they held him by the limbs and carried him with great care as if he were a fragile precious object.

"It's good water," declared the cripple in a decided voice; "it's good water, and has no equal. It's worth a fortune, is water like that!"

Andermatt suddenly turned to his father-in-law.

"Don't wait lunch for me. I'm going to the Oriols', and I don't know when I shall get away. One must permit no delay in these matters!"

He departed hurriedly, almost running, and twirling his cane distractedly.

The rest sat down under the willows at the roadside, facing old Clovis's hole.

Christiane, at Paul's side, gazed at the high ridge from which she had seen the landmark blown up! She had been up there, that day scarcely a month ago! She had sat on the rusty grass! A month! Only a month! She remembered the smallest details, the tricolour sun-shades, the children, the most trifling remarks that anyone had made! And the dog, the poor dog blown to bits by the explosion! And the tall, unknown young man, who had dashed forward at a word from her, to save the animal! To-day he was her lover! Her lover! So she had a lover! She was his mistress! — his mistress! She repeated the word in the secret recesses of her mind — his mistress! What a strange word! This man, sitting beside her, whose hand she could see, plucking one by one the blades of grass growing near her dress, which he was trying to touch, this man was now bound to her flesh and to her heart by that mysterious, shameful chain, not to be confessed, that nature has stretched between woman and man.

The voice of her mind, the dumb voice that seems to speak so loud in the silence of the troubled soul, continually repeated: "I am his mistress! His mistress! His mistress!" How strange it was, how unforeseen!

"Do I love him?" She threw a swift glance at him. Their eyes met, and she felt so caressed by the passionate gaze in which he had enfolded her that she trembled from head to foot. She had a mad, irresistible longing, now, to take the hand lying on the grass and squeeze it tightly, to express thereby all that an embrace can. She slid her own hand down her dress till it reached the grass, and let it lie there, motionless, the fingers extended. Then she saw the other softly approaching, like a beast seeking his mate. It came closer and closer, and their little fingers touched! Lightly the tips met,

scarcely touching, then parted and met again, like kissing lips. But this imperceptible caress, this lightly hovering touch, worked so powerfully upon her that she felt on the point of swooning, as though he had once more crushed her in his arms.

And suddenly she understood how one human being can belong to another, become nothing, in the grip of love, and how one human being can take another, body and soul, flesh, thought, will, blood, nerves, the whole soul, like a great, wide-winged bird of prey swooping upon a wren.

The marquis and Gontran were talking of the spa that was to be, won over by Will's enthusiasm. They spoke of the merits of the banker, the clarity of his mind, the sureness of his judgment, the invariable success of his speculative methods, the boldness of his methods, and the regularity of his character. Father-in-law and brother-in-law, faced with a probability of success that they regarded as a certainty, united in congratulating each other upon the alliance.

Christiane and Paul were apparently too much occupied with each other to listen.

"Why, darling," said the marquis to his daughter, "one day you may well become one of the richest women in France, and be spoken of in the same breath with the Rothschilds. Will really is a remarkable man, a very remarkable man, a great brain."

But Paul was suddenly attacked by a strange, swift fit of jealousy.

"I know these business men," he said; "they've got the brains of brewers. They've only one thing in their heads: money! All the thought we give to beautiful things, all the energy we waste over our idle fancies, all the hours we give up to our amusements, all the strength we squander on our pleasures, all the ardour and power that we spend on love, divine love, they employ in

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seeking gold, thinking of gold, heaping gold upon gold! Man, intelligent man, lives for all the great disinterested emotions, art, love, science, travel, books; and if he seeks money, it is because it facilitates the genuine pleasures of the mind and even the happiness of the heart! But they have nothing in their minds or hearts but this ignoble taste for trade! These parasites on life bear the same relation to men of real worth as the picture-dealer to the artist, the publisher to the writer, or the manager of a theatre to the poet."

Suddenly he paused, realising that he was allowing himself to be carried away by his feelings.

"I don't in the least mean that to apply to Andermatt," he continued more calmly. "I think he is charming, and I like him so much because he is a hundred times better than all the others."

Christiane had withdrawn her hand, and Paul again relapsed into silence.

Gontran began to laugh.

"At all events, my dear chap," he observed in the mischievous voice in which, in his hours of deliberate raillery, there was nothing he dared not say, "at all events, these men have one rare merit: they marry our sisters and have rich daughters who become our wives."

The marquis rose, hurt.

"Oh, Gontran," he said, "at times you are revolting!"

Paul turned to Christiane and murmured:

"Could they die for a woman, or even give her all their fortune — all — without keeping a penny?"

This said so plainly: "All that I have is yours, even my life," that she was moved, and evolved a plan to hold his hands.

"Get up and pull me up," she said. "I am so sleepy, I cannot move."

He rose and, seizing her wrists, dragged her to a standing position, close against him, on the roadside.

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She saw his mouth falter: "I love you," and quickly turned away so as not to answer, in her turn, the same three words, which, in spite of herself, rose to her lips in an impulse that urged her towards him.

They walked back towards the hotel.

The bathing-hour had already gone by, and they awaited luncheon. She rang, but Andermatt had not returned. After another stroll in the park they decided to have lunch. The meal, though long, came to an end without the banker's putting in his appearance. They went down again and sat under the trees. One after another the hours went by, the sun glided over the trees, and sank towards the mountain tops. The day was passing, but Will did not appear.

Suddenly they perceived him. He was walking fast, holding his hat and mopping his brow. His tie was on one side and his waistcoat unbuttoned, as though after a journey or a fight, a fierce prolonged struggle.

As soon as he saw his father-in-law, he exclaimed:

"Victory! It's done! But what a day! The old fox gave me a devil of a time!"

He plunged at once into a recital of his actions and his difficulties.

Old Oriol had at first proved so unreasonable that Andermatt had broken off negotiations and departed. Then he was called back. The peasant aimed at not selling his land, but at putting it into the company, with the right to recover it in case of failure. If successful, he demanded half the profits.

The banker had had to demonstrate, with figures on paper and drawings to represent the various pieces of land, that the sum total of the value of the fields did not at the moment amount to more than eighty thousand francs, while the expenses of the company at the outset would amount to a million.

But the peasant had replied that he meant to benefit

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by the enormous increase in value which would result from the building of the pump-room and hotels, and to draw an income derived from the acquired value of the property, not from its old value.

So Andermatt had had to represent to him that the risks would be proportional to the possible profit, and to terrify him by the fear of a loss.

Eventually they had come to the following agreement: Old Oriol was to contribute to the company all his land as far as the banks of the stream, that is to say, all the land wherein it appeared possible that mineral water might be found, and, in addition, the summit of the ridge, in order that a casino and a hotel might be built upon it, and a few vineyards on the hill-side which were to be divided up into plots and offered to the leading Paris doctors.

In return for this contribution, valued at two hundred and fifty thousand francs, that is to say, about four times its actual value, the peasant was to have a quarter-share in the profits of the company. As he was to retain ten times as much land as he was giving, all round the future pump-room, he was certain, in the event of success, to make a fortune by the prudent sale of his land, which, he said, would constitute his daughters' dowries.

As soon as these conditions had been agreed on, Will had had to drag father and son to the notary, to draw up a promise of sale, capable of annulment if the necessary water were not found.

And the drawing up of the document, the discussion of each point, the endless repetition of the same arguments, and the perpetual necessity of beginning the same trains of reasoning all over again, had lasted the whole afternoon.

At last it was finished. The banker had his spa. But one regret rankled.

"I shall have to limit myself to the water," he said;

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"I cannot pay any attention to land. Old Oriol was a devilish sly old dog.

"Bah!" he added. "I'll buy up the old company, and I can speculate in that! . . . Anyhow, I must go back to Paris this evening."

"What, this evening!" exclaimed the marquis, in amazement.

"Yes, my dear father-in-law, to draw up the contract, while Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur sinks a shaft. And I must arrange for the work to be begun within a fortnight. I have not an hour to lose. Oh, and by the way, I should tell you that I have put you on my board, as I shall need a large majority. I am giving you ten shares, and ten to you too, Gontran."

"Thank you very much," laughed Gontran; "I'll sell them back to you. That will be five thousand francs you owe me."

But over such important matters Andermatt was not disposed to jest.

"If you cannot be serious," he replied coldly, "I will go to someone else."

Gontran stopped laughing.

"No, no, old chap," he protested, "you know I am entirely at your service."

"My dear sir," said the banker, turning to Paul, "will you be a true friend to me, and be good enough to accept ten shares too, together with the title of director?"

"You must permit me," replied Paul, with a bow, "not to accept your very kind offer, but to put a hundred thousand francs of my own into the concern, which I consider to be first-rate. It is you who are doing me the favour."

William grasped his hand in delight, won over by the other's display of confidence. He always felt an irresistible longing to embrace those who contributed money to his enterprises.

But Christiane blushed to the temples, stricken, bruised. She felt as though she had just been bought and sold. If Paul had not loved her, would he have offered her husband those hundred thousand francs? No, of course not! At any rate, it had been wrong of him to transact the affair in her presence.

The bell rang for dinner. They went back up the hill to the hotel. As soon as they were seated, the elder Madame Paille asked Andermatt:

"Is it true that you are going to start another pump-room?"

The news had already gone the round of the whole neighbourhood, and was known to everybody. The patients were all excited about it.

"Certainly I am," replied Will; "the present one is quite inadequate."

He turned to Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur:

"You will excuse me — won't you? — for talking business with you at table, but I am returning to Paris this evening and am terribly pressed for time. Would you consent to supervise sinking-operations in search of a greater volume of water?"

The engineer accepted, feeling flattered, and, amid general silence, they arranged all the essential details of the search for water: it was to begin immediately. It was all discussed and settled in a few minutes, with the clarity and precision that Andermatt always brought to business interviews. Then they spoke of the cripple. He had been seen, in the afternoon, crossing the park with one stick only, whereas, that same morning, he had been using two.

"It is a miracle, a real miracle," declared the banker. "His cure is progressing with giant strides."

"It is old Clovis himself who is progressing with giant strides," retorted Paul, to please the husband.

An approving laugh ran round the table. All eyes

were on Will, all mouths full of compliments to him. The waiters had begun to serve him before the others, with an air of respectful deference that vanished from their faces and their gestures as soon as they began serving the others.

One of them offered him a card upon a plate.

He took it up and read half aloud: "Doctor Latonne, of Paris, would be happy if Monsieur Andermatt would be good enough to grant him an interview of a few moments, before his departure."

"Say that I have not time, but shall be back in eight or ten days."

Simultaneously they brought Christiane a bunch of flowers, sent by Doctor Honorat.

"Old Bonnefille is a bad third," laughed Gontran.

Dinner was nearly over. Andermatt was informed that his carriage was waiting. He went upstairs to fetch his little bag, and when he came down found half the village assembled outside the door. Petrus Martel came up and shook hands with the ingratiating familiarity of a provincial actor.

"I shall have a proposal to put before you," he murmured into his ear, "a startling suggestion about your business."

Suddenly Doctor Bonnefille appeared, in a hurry as usual. He went right up to Will and bowed as low as he did to the marquis.

"A pleasant journey, Monsieur le Baron!" he said.

"A hit!" whispered Gontran.

Andermatt, triumphant, swelling with joy and pride: shook hands all round, thanking everyone and repeating, "Au revoir!" But he nearly forgot to kiss his wife, so distracted were his thoughts. His indifference was a relief to her, and when she saw the landau and pair speeding away on the dark road at a lively trot, she felt as though she had nothing more to fear for the rest of her life.

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She spent the whole evening sitting in front of the hotel, between her father and Paul Brétigny; Gontran, according to his daily custom, had gone off to the Casino.

She did not desire to walk or talk; she remained motionless, her hands crossed on her knees, her eyes lost in the darkness, languid and weak, a little uneasy, yet happy, she scarcely thought and did not even dream, struggling at times against a vague feeling of remorse, that she repulsed by repeating to herself perpetually: "I love him, I love him, I love him!"

She went up early to her room, so as to be alone and think. Sitting in an arm-chair, and wrapped in a flowing dressing-gown, she gazed through her open window at the stars; and in the window-frame evoked constantly the image of the man who had conquered her.

She saw him, kind, gentle or violent, strong or prostrate at her feet. The man had captured her, she knew it, had captured her for ever. She was no longer alone, they were two whose hearts would form one heart, whose two souls would form but one soul. Where he was she knew not, but she knew that he was dreaming of her as she of him. At each beat of her heart she fancied that she heard another answering from the distance. She felt desire, prowling round her, brushing lightly against her like a bird's wing; she felt it enter through the open window, desire flowing from him, ardent desire, seeking her, imploring in the silence of the night. How good it was, how sweet, how new, to be loved! What joy it was to have someone that she thought of only with a longing for tears in her eyes, for tears of love; with a longing to open her arms to summon him, even when he was out of sight, to open her arms to his ever-present image, to the kiss that he was always throwing her, whether he was at her side or far away, while she waited in a fever of expectation.

She stretched out her two arms, white in the sleeves

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of her dressing-gown, towards the stars. Suddenly she uttered a cry. A great black shadow, straddling across the rail of her balcony, had risen in the window.

She started with terror! It was he! And, without even thinking whether they could be seen, she flung herself upon his breast.

VIII

ANDERMATT'S absence was prolonged, and Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur went on with the sinking-operations. He found four more springs, that supplied the new company with twice as much water as it needed. The entire neighbourhood, bewildered by the investigations and discoveries, by the great news that was spread abroad and the prospects of a brilliant future, went wild with enthusiasm and could neither speak nor think of anything else. Even the marquis and Gontran spent their days hanging about the workmen who were examining the veins of granite, and listened with growing interest to the engineer's explanations and lessons upon the geological characteristics of Auvergne. And Paul and Christiane could indulge their love freely and calmly, in absolute security; no one took any notice of them, no one guessed anything, no one even thought of spying upon them, for everyone's attention, curiosity, and eager interest were absorbed by the future spa.

Christiane had behaved like a youth getting drunk for the first time. The first glass, the first kiss, had scorched and dazed her. Quickly had she drunk the second, and had found it better, and now she was gulping furiously.

Ever since the evening when Paul had come into her room, she had had no idea of what was happening in the world. Time, things, people no longer had any existence for her; nothing existed, save one man. One man alone was left on earth or in heaven, a solitary man, the man she loved. Her eyes saw only him, her mind thought of

naught but him, to him alone she devoted all her hope. She lived, moved from one position to another, ate, dressed, seemed to listen, and made answer, all without understanding or knowing what she was doing. No misgivings haunted her, for no misfortune could have touched her. She had become incapable of feeling anything. No physical pain could have got a hold on her flesh, which quivered only to the touch of love. No moral pain could have got a hold upon her soul, which was paralysed by happiness.

And Paul, loving her with the reckless intensity that he squandered upon all his emotions, spurred her passion to madness. Often, near the fall of night, when he knew that the marquis and Gontran had gone off to the springs, he would say:

“Let us go and see our heaven!”

“Their heaven” was a clump of pine-trees growing on the hill-side, above even the gorges. They ascended to it through a little wood, up a steep path that made Christiane gasp for breath. As they had little time to spare, they walked fast, and he would support her by the waist, so that she should not tire herself so much. She would put one hand on his shoulder and allow herself to be carried; occasionally she would cling tightly about his neck and set her mouth upon his lips. The higher they ascended, the keener grew the air; and when they reached the clump of pine-trees, the scent of resin refreshed them like a sea-breeze.

They sat down under the dark trees, she on a grass bank, he lower down, at her feet. The wind in the boughs sang the sweet plaintive song of the pines, and the immense Limagne, its horizon invisible, drowned in mist, offered them a perfect illusion of the ocean. Yes, the sea was down there before their eyes! They could not doubt it, for its breath blew upon their faces!

He played small childish games with her.

"Give me your fingers to eat," he would say; "they are my sweets."

One after another, he took them in his mouth and pretended to savour them with little shivers of greedy pleasure.

"Oh, how delicious!" he would continue; "particularly the little one! I've never eaten anything better than the little one."

Then he would go down on his knees, resting his elbows on Christiane's knees, and murmuring:

"Look at me, Liane."

He called her Liane because she twined herself about him when she embraced him, like a creeper about a tree.

"Look at me," he would insist. "I am going to enter into your soul."

And they would gaze at one another with an immobile, obstinate gaze, such a gaze as seems to mingle two human beings in each other in utter union.

"Real love means possessing one another in this way, and in this way alone," he said. "All the other ways of love are ugly gestures."

And face to face, mingling their breath, they sought one another passionately in the transparency of their eyes.

"I see you, Liane," he murmured; "I see your heart and adore it."

"I too, Paul," she replied, "I see your heart."

And they saw each other, to the depths of their souls and their hearts; for nothing was left in their souls and hearts save a wild wind of mutual love.

"Liane," he said, "your eyes are like the sky, blue, full of gleaming light. I fancy I can see swallows flying across them; those must be your thoughts, aren't they?"

And when they had thus gazed for a long, long time, they drew yet closer to one another and gently embraced, in brief, swift rushes, gazing at each other again between each kiss. Sometimes he would take her in his arms and

carry her, running beside the stream that glided along towards the gorges of Enval before plunging down into them. It was a narrow valley, wherein woodland followed meadow and meadow woodland. Paul would run on through the grass; and sometimes, swinging Christiane up in his strong hands, he would cry:

“Liane, let us fly away!”

It was love, their exalted love, that thrust upon them this longing to fly away, a racking, incessant, painful desire, that was made more acute by everything around them, the rare air — the birds’ air, he called it — and the vast, blue-misted prospect below into which they longed to launch themselves, hand in hand, and vanish above the limitless plain tented by the night. And so they might have fled through the hazy evening sky and never come back again. Where would they have gone? They did not know; but what a dream!

When he was out of breath with running and carrying her, he would set her down on a rock and kneel before her. And he would kiss her ankles and adore her and murmur tender, childish things to her.

If they had loved in a town, their passion would doubtless have been a different thing, more prudent and sensual, less airy and romantic. But in this green land where the far horizon broadened the impulses of the soul, they were alone, with nothing to distract them or to attenuate their new-born instinct for love, and they had swiftly plunged into a passion wildly romantic, built of ecstasy and madness. The country-side, the warm wind, the woods, the sweet scent of the country played the music of love to them all day and all night long, exciting them to frenzy, as the sound of the tambourines and the shrill flutes spurs on the whirling fanatical dervish to deeds of unreasoning ferocity.

One evening, as they were coming back to the hotel for dinner, the marquis suddenly said to them:

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"Andermatt is returning in four days; the whole business has been fixed up. We are all going home the day after his arrival. We have been here a long time; we must not overdo the mineral water treatment."

They were as amazed as though the end of the world had been announced; neither spoke a word during the meal, their minds were so distracted by these surprising arrangements for the immediate future. In a few days, then, they would be separated, no longer free to see one another; it seemed so impossible and strange that they could not realise it.

Andermatt duly returned at the end of the week. He had telegraphed to them to send two carriages to meet the first train. Christiane, who had not slept at all, being tormented by a strange new emotion, a sort of fear of her husband, a fear not unmixed with anger, inexplicable contempt, and a desire to defy him. He arrived in the first carriage, accompanied by three gentlemen, well dressed but of modest mien. The second carriage contained four more, who appeared a little inferior in station to the first three. The marquis and Gontran were very much surprised.

"Who are these people?" inquired the latter.

"My shareholders," replied Andermatt. "We shall formally float the company this very day, and immediately nominate the board of directors."

He kissed his wife without speaking to her, almost too preoccupied even to see her; then turned to the seven gentlemen who were standing respectfully and silently behind him.

"Go and get something to eat, and go for a walk," he said. "We will meet here at twelve."

They departed in silence, like soldiers obeying a command, ascended the steps in pairs, and disappeared into the hotel.

Gontran watched them go.

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"Where did you find your beauty chorus?" he asked with an air of perfect seriousness.

The banker smiled.

"They're quite all right; they're men of property, capitalists."

And, after a pause, he added with a still broader smile: "who are taking an interest in my affairs."

Then he went to the lawyer's, to read over the articles that he had drawn up and sent several days previously.

He found there Doctor Latonne, with whom he had exchanged several letters, and they had a long conversation, in low tones, in a corner of the study, while the clerks' pens ran over the paper with a faint sound like the buzzing of insects.

It was decided that they should meet at two o'clock to float the company.

The lawyer's study had been arranged as though for a concert. Two rows of chairs awaited the shareholders, facing the table where Maître Alain was to sit beside his head clerk. Maître Alain had put on his gown, in view of the importance of the occasion; he was a very small man, a ball of white flesh, afflicted with a stammer.

Andermatt entered as two o'clock was striking, accompanied by the marquis, his brother-in-law, and Brétigny, and followed by the seven gentlemen whom Gontran called the beauty chorus. He looked like a general. Old Oriol appeared simultaneously with Colosse. They looked uneasy and distrustful, as all peasants do when signing papers. Doctor Latonne came last. He had made his peace with Andermatt by a complete submission, preceded by adroitly turned excuses and followed by offers of unrestricted service without concealment from the other doctors.

Whereupon the banker, knowing that he held him in

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the hollow of his hand, had promised him the coveted position of inspecting officer of health to the new pump-room.

When everyone had come in, deep silence reigned.

The lawyer broke the spell:

“Be seated, gentlemen.”

He added several more words, but no one heard them through the noise of the chairs being moved.

Andermatt took a chair and placed it facing his army, so as to be able to keep an eye upon his whole party. When all were seated, he began:

“Gentlemen, I need not give you any explanations of the reason for which we are assembled. We are first going to draw up the constitution of the new company in which you have been so good as to become shareholders. I should, however, inform you of a few details which have caused us a little trouble. I found it necessary, before setting to work at all, to make sure that we should obtain the necessary authorisation for the creation of a new building of public utility. I am assured of this, and I shall do what remains to be done under this heading; I have the word of the Minister himself for it. But another point occurred to me. We are, gentlemen, about to enter upon a struggle with the old water company of Enval. We shall issue victorious from that struggle, victorious and rich, you may be certain of that; but, just as the warriors of old needed a battle-cry, so we warriors in a modern war need a name for our thermal station, a sonorous captivating name, well suited for advertisements, striking the ear like a trumpet-call and impressing the eye like a flash of lightning. Now we are at Enval, gentlemen, and we cannot un-baptise the place. Only one resource remains for us: to designate our thermal establishment alone by a new name.

“This is what I propose:

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“If our pump-room is built at the foot of the ridge owned by Monsieur Oriol, here present, our future casino will be situated at the summit of the same ridge. We may therefore say that this ridge, this mountain — for it is a mountain, a small mountain — constitutes our thermal establishment, since we own its foot and summit. Would it not therefore be natural to call our baths ‘The Mont-Oriol Baths,’ and to append to this station, which is destined to be one of the most important watering-places in the whole world, the name of the original owner? Let us render unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar’s.

“And observe, gentlemen, what an excellent name it is. People will say ‘Mont-Oriol’ as they say ‘Mont-Dore.’ It abides in the eye and in the ear, it looks well, it sound well, it stays in the mind: Mont-Oriol! — Mont-Oriol! — The Mont-Oriol baths. . . .”

And Andermatt made the word ring like a bell, tossed it about like a ball, and listened for the echo.

He continued, representing various dialogues:

“‘Are you going to the Mont-Oriol baths?’ — ‘Yes, madame, I am told the Mont-Oriol waters are perfect.’ — ‘Yes, excellent; and Mont-Oriol is a beautiful place.’”

He smiled, pretending to converse, changing his tone to indicate when the lady was speaking, and saluting with his hand when representing the gentleman.

Then he continued, in his natural voice:

“Has anyone any objection to put forward?”

The shareholders replied in chorus:

“No, none.”

Three of the beauty chorus applauded.

Old Oriol, excited and flattered, overcome by his inner pride as a self-made man, smiled and twirled his hat in his hands; in spite of himself, he nodded “yes,” a “yes” which revealed his pleasure and which Andermatt saw without appearing to be looking at him.

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Colosse remained impassive, but was as pleased as his father.

Then Andermatt said to the lawyer:

“Be good enough to read the deed for the constitution of the company, Maître Alain.”

And he sat down.

“Now, Marinet,” said the lawyer to his clerk, and Marinet, a poor consumptive creature, cleared his throat: with the intonation of a preacher and in declamatory style, he began to enumerate the statutes relative to the constitution of a limited company to be called the Thermal Establishment of Mont-Oriol, at Enval, Company, capital two millions.

Old Oriol interrupted him.

“One moment, one moment,” he said.

And he pulled out of his pocket a greasy exercise-book which during the past week he had carried to all the lawyers and business men in the county. It was his copy of the agreement, and he and his son were beginning to know it by heart.

Then he slowly perched his spectacles upon his nose, raised his head, sought the exact position in which he could read the letters best, and commanded:

“Go on, Marinet.”

Colosse drew up his chair and joined his father in following in the exercise-book.

Marinet began again, and old Oriol, bewildered by the double task of listening and reading at the same time, tortured by the fear that a word might have been changed, obsessed too by his eagerness to see whether Andermatt was not making signs to the lawyer, never let a line go by without stopping the clerk ten times and ruining his rhetorical effects.

“Eh?” he kept saying. “What was that you said? I never heard! Not so fast.” And, turning to his son, he would ask: “Is that right, Colosse?”

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"It's all right, Father; let him go on, it's all right," Colosse would reply, less overcome by the occasion.

The peasant had no confidence. With the tip of his bent finger he followed on his paper, mumbling the words between his lips. But his attention could not fasten upon both sides simultaneously; when he was listening, he could not read, and when he was reading, he could not listen. And he panted as though he had just climbed a mountain, and perspired as though he had been hoeing big vines full in the sun. From time to time he demanded a few minutes' rest, to wipe his brow and get his breath, like a man fighting a duel.

Andermatt tapped the floor with his foot in his impatience. Gontran, having perceived the "Puy-de-Dôme Monitor" lying on a table, had taken it up and was looking through its pages. Paul, straddling across his chair, with bowed head and tortured heart, was reflecting that the little pink, pot-bellied man sitting in front of him was on the following day to carry off the woman he loved with all his soul, Christiane, his Christiane, his fair-haired Christiane, who was his, all his, and none other's.

"Shall I not run away with her this very night?" he asked himself.

The seven gentlemen remained solemn and composed.

In an hour it was finished. They signed.

The lawyer witnessed the purchase. The treasurer, Monsieur Abraham Lévy, was called upon and declared that he had received the company's funds. Then the company, now legally constituted, was declared to be assembled in a general meeting, all the shareholders being present, for the purpose of appointing its board of directors and electing its president.

All the votes but two were for Andermatt as president. The two dissentients, the peasant and his son, had

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voted for Oriol. Brétigny was appointed shareholders' representative.

Then the board of directors, consisting of Messieurs Andermatt, the Marquis and the Comte de Ravenel, Brétigny, the two Oriols, Doctor Latonne, Abraham Lévy, and Simon Zidler, requested the rest of the shareholders to retire, together with the lawyer and his clerk, so that it might deliberate upon the first decisions to be made and settle the most important details.

Andermatt rose once more:

“Gentlemen, we are now concerned with the pressing question of success, which we must obtain at all costs.

“Mineral waters are like everything else; they must be constantly, perpetually talked about, if invalids are to be induced to drink them.

“The great modern problem, gentlemen, is advertising, the god of the commerce and industry of to-day. Without advertising there is no salvation. Now the art of advertising is difficult and complicated, and demands the exercise of great tact. The first men who employed this new process did it brutally, attracting attention by noise; they merely went in for the methods of the big drum and the cannon-shot. Mangin, gentlemen, was only a forerunner. Nowadays, noise is viewed with suspicion, gaudy posters are smiled at, and names shouted in the streets arouse more distrust than curiosity. Yet it is essential that the attention of the public should be attracted, and that it should be convinced as well as startled. The art therefore consists in discovering the method, the only method that can succeed with the commodity to be sold. Now, gentlemen, we want to sell water. It is by way of the doctors that we must conquer the patients.

“The most celebrated doctors, gentlemen, are men like ourselves, and have their weaknesses just as we have. I do not mean to say that they can be corrupted. The

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reputations of the famous heads of their profession whom we need guarantee them from the faintest suspicion of venality. But what men cannot be won, if you go the right way about it? There are women who cannot be bought! They have to be seduced.

“Now this, gentlemen, is the proposal I put before you; I have discussed it at length with Doctor Latonne:

“First of all, we classified the diseases which will yield to our treatment into three main groups. They are: 1. Rheumatism in all its forms, herpes, arthritis, gout, etc.; 2. Disorders of the stomach, the intestines, and the liver; 3. All the maladies resulting from bad circulation, for it is indisputable that our acidulated baths have an excellent effect upon the circulation.

“In addition, gentlemen, the marvellous cure of old Clovis promises us miracles in the future.

“So, given the maladies which will yield to our water, we shall make the following proposal to the chief doctors who specialise in them: ‘Gentlemen,’ we shall say, ‘come and see, come and see with your own eyes, follow your patients, we offer you hospitality. The country is glorious, and you need a rest after your hard winter’s work. So come, and not to our homes, but to your own, for we can offer you houses which, if you like, will become your property, on exceptional terms.’”

Andermatt paused, and recommenced in a calmer voice:

“This is how I have carried out the idea: We have chosen six plots of land, each a thousand metres square. On each of these six plots the Berne Portable Chalet Company has undertaken to set up one of its model buildings. We shall put these elegant and comfortable dwellings freely at the disposal of our doctors. If they like living there, they will buy the houses only from the Berne Company; as for the land, we shall give it to them — and they will pay for them . . . in patients. Thus,

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gentlemen, we get the combined advantages of covering our land with charming villas which cost us nothing, of attracting the best doctors in the world and their host of clients, and, above all, of proving the efficacy of our waters to eminent men who will speedily become landowners in the district. As for all the arrangements necessary to bring about these results, I will be responsible for them, gentlemen, and I shall not go about the business as a speculator, but as a man of the world."

Old Oriol interrupted. His Auvergnat parsimony was outraged by the idea of giving the land.

Andermatt replied with a flight of oratory, comparing the great farmer who throws the seed in handfuls upon the fertile soil with the niggardly peasant who counts every grain and never reaps more than a half-harvest.

Then, as Oriol proved offended and obstinate, the banker took a vote of the board and silenced the old man by six votes to four.

Next, he opened a large morocco portfolio and took from it the plans of the new pump-room, the hotel, and the casino, together with the tenders and contracts with the builders, all ready to be approved and signed on the spot. The work was to be commenced at the beginning of the following week.

The two Oriols were the only ones who wanted to see the papers and discuss the matter. But Andermatt was exasperated.

"Am I asking you for money?" he said. "No! Then hold your tongues! And if you aren't satisfied, we'll vote again."

They accordingly signed with the other members of the board, and the meeting was concluded.

The entire neighbourhood was waiting to see them come out, so great was the general excitement, and they were respectfully saluted. As the two peasants were about to set off home, Andermatt said to them:

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"Don't forget that we are all dining together at the hotel. And bring your daughters; I've brought them some little presents from Paris."

They agreed to meet at seven in the drawing-room of the Splendid Hotel.

Dinner was a great affair. The banker had invited the principal patients and the local authorities. Christiane presided, with the priest on her right and the mayor on her left.

The new pump-room and the future of the village formed the only topics of conversation. The two Oriol girls had found under their napkins two jewel-cases containing two bracelets studded with pearls and emeralds, and, wild with delight, talked as they never had talked before, to Gontran, who was sitting between them. Even the elder laughed heartily at the pleasantries of the young man, who grew more animated as he spoke, forming his private opinions of them, the audacious secret opinions born of a man's flesh and spirit in the presence of every desirable woman.

Paul could neither eat nor speak. . . . He felt as though his life were coming to an end that very evening. Suddenly he remembered that it was exactly a month, to the very day, since their picnic at Lake Tazenat. In his soul lay that vague pain born of forebodings rather than grief, a pain known only to lovers, the pain that weighs so heavily on the heart and sets the nerves so furiously quivering that the least noise snatches away the breath and fills the spirit with a terrible unhappiness, until every sound takes on a painful meaning that conforms with the obsessing grief.

As soon as they rose from the table, he joined Christiane in the sitting-room.

"I must see you to-night," he said, "now, at once, since I do not know when we can be alone together again. Do you know that it is just a month to-day . . ."

"Yes, I know," she replied.

"Listen," he continued. "I will wait for you on the Roche-Pradière road, on this side of the village, by the chestnut-trees. No one will notice your absence now. Come quickly and say good-bye to me, since we are to part to-morrow."

"I shall be there in a quarter of an hour," she murmured.

He went out, anxious to remain no longer in the crowd that infuriated him.

He took the path through the vineyards, the path he had followed on the day when they had seen the Limagne together for the first time. Soon he was on the high road. He was alone, he felt alone, alone in the world. The immense invisible plain still more augmented his feeling of isolation. He stopped just at the spot where they had sat down and he had recited Baudelaire's verses on Beauty to her. How far away it seemed, already! And, hour by hour, he endured again in his memory all that had happened since then. Never had he been so happy, never! Never had he loved so passionately and, at the same time, so chastely and devoutly. He recalled the evening at the Tazenat gourd, a month ago that very day, the cool wood, moistened with pale light, the little silvery lake and the great fish that rippled its surface; and their return, when he saw her walking ahead of him, in shadow or light, in the rain of moonlight falling through the leaves upon her hair, her shoulders, and her arms. They were the sweetest hours he had savoured in all his life.

He turned to see if she were coming. He did not see her, but he saw the moon, risen above the horizon. The same moon that had risen for his first avowal rose now for his first good-bye.

A shiver ran over his skin, a shiver of cold. Autumn was coming, autumn followed by winter. Till now he

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had not felt the first touch of cold, that pierced him suddenly like the threat of some misfortune.

The white dusty road streamed before him like a river between its banks. Suddenly a figure appeared at the spot where the path turned off. He recognised it at once, and waited motionless, quivering with the mysterious happiness of feeling her draw near, of seeing her coming to him, for him.

She walked in short strides, not daring to call to him, uneasy at not yet finding him, for he remained hidden behind a tree. And she was dismayed at the utter silence, at the translucent solitude of earth and heaven. Her shadow moved before her, black and monstrous, far in front, seeming to bring him something of her before she came herself.

Christiane stopped, and the shadow also remained motionless, prostrate, fallen upon the road.

Paul stepped rapidly forward for a short distance, until he reached the spot where the shadow of her head formed a circle upon the ground. Then, as though anxious not to waste any part of her, he knelt down and, bowing to the ground, set his mouth to the edge of the dark outline. As a thirsty dog drinks, flattened upon its belly, at the edge of a spring, so he began passionately to kiss the dust, following the contours of the shadow of his beloved. So he crept towards her, on hands and knees, covering the outline of her body with caresses, as though to gather in his lips the dear dark image spread out upon the ground.

Surprised and even a little frightened, she did not find courage to speak to him until he was at her feet; then, when he had raised his head, still kneeling, but now embracing her in his arms, she asked:

“What is the matter with you this evening?”

“Liane, I am going to lose you,” he replied.

She sank her fingers into her lover’s thick hair and,

bending over him, thrust back his forehead and kissed his eyes.

“Why lose me?” she said, smiling and confident.

“Because we are to part to-morrow.”

“Part? But for so short a time, darling.”

“How can one ever know? We shall never recover the days we have spent here.”

“We shall have others that will be as wonderful.”

She brought him to his feet and led him to the tree where he had waited for her. There she made him sit down, close to her, but a little lower, so that she could keep her hand in his hair. And she spoke to him seriously, in the manner of a passionate and determined woman who has thought things out and made her decisions, who has already foreseen every circumstance, knows instinctively what must be done, and is prepared for everything.

“Listen, darling; I am my own mistress in Paris. William never bothers about me, his business is enough for him. So, since you are not married, I shall come and see you. I shall come every day, sometimes in the morning before breakfast and sometimes in the evening, because of the servants, who might talk if I were always going out at the same time. We shall be able to meet as often as we have here, for we shall have no inquisitive eyes to fear.”

But, with his head on her knees and his arms about her waist, he kept saying:

“Liane, Liane, I am going to lose you! I feel that I am going to lose you!”

She grew irritated at his unreasoning grief, a childish grief dwelling in so strong a body, and she so frail beside him, yet so sure of herself, so sure that nothing could keep them apart.

“If you wish it, Liane,” he murmured, “we will fly together, we will go away to a beautiful land full of

flowers, and live and love there. Answer, shall we go — to-night — shall we?"

But she stiffened her shoulders, a little nervous, a little displeased that he would not listen, for it was no time for idle dreams and amorous dalliance. Now was the moment for energy and prudence; they must seek for a means of continuing their love without arousing suspicion.

"Listen, darling," she went on. "We must have a proper understanding of one another, and we must beware of carelessness or mistakes. First, are you sure of your servants? What we have most to dread is a denunciation, an anonymous letter to my husband. By himself he will never guess. I know William"

The name, repeated for the second time, touched Paul's nerves on the raw.

"Oh, don't speak of him to-night!" he muttered.

"Why not?" she said in surprise. "We must Oh, I can assure you he does not think of me!"

She had guessed his thought.

Jealousy, obscure, as yet unconscious of itself, was aroused in him. Suddenly he knelt down and took her hands.

"Listen, Liane!" he said, and paused. He dared not voice his misgivings, the shameful suspicion that had come into his mind, and he did not know how to express it.

"Listen . . . Liane. . . . How are things between you?"

She did not understand.

"Why . . . why . . . quite all right."

"Yes . . . I know. . . . But . . . listen . . . understand what I mean. . . . He's . . . he's your husband . . . after all . . . and . . . and . . . you don't know how much that has obsessed my mind just lately. . . . How it torments me . . . tortures me. . . . Do you understand? . . ."

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She hesitated for a few moments, then suddenly realised all that he meant.

"Oh, my darling!" she exclaimed in a burst of outraged honesty. "How can you . . . how could you think . . . ? Oh! I am yours . . . yours only . . . since I love you. . . . Oh! Paul! . . ."

He let his head fall back upon his knees, and answered very softly:

"But . . . after all . . . little Liane . . . since he is your husband . . . what will you do? . . . Have you thought of that? . . . Have you? . . . What will you do to-night? . . . or to-morrow? . . . For you cannot always . . . say 'no' to him. . . ."

She, too, answered very softly.

"I have made him believe that I have a baby coming, and . . . he is satisfied! He does not think of me much in that way. . . . Don't let us talk of such things, darling; you don't know how it bruises me, hurts me. Trust me; for I love you. . . ."

He did not move, but lay inhaling the scent of her dress and kissing it, while she caressed his face with light loving fingers.

"We must go back," she said suddenly. "People will notice that we are both absent."

They enfolded each other in a long crushing embrace; then she departed, running so as to be back more quickly, and he watched her receding form disappear, desolate as though all his happiness and all his hopes had fled with her.

PART II

I

ONE would hardly have recognised Enval on the first of July of the following year.

Upon the summit of the ridge that rose between the two passages of the forked outlet of the valley, stood a building in the Moorish style of architecture, bearing upon its front the word "Casino" in golden letters.

A little wood had been utilised for the creation of a small park on the slope facing towards the Limagne. In front of the building, dominating the vast plain of Auvergne, was a terrace, supported by a wall adorned from end to end with large, imitation-marble vases.

Lower down, in the vineyards, the printed wooden façades of six chalets appeared through the foliage.

Upon the southern side of the ridge was an immense, pure white building, beckoning to distant travellers, who could see it as they were leaving Riom. It was the Grand Hotel of Mont-Oriol. Immediately below it, at the foot of the hill, a square house, simpler in style but also enormous, surrounded by a garden through which flowed the stream from the gorges, offered to the sick the miraculous cures promised by a pamphlet of Doctor Latonne's. On the façade appeared: "Mont-Oriol Thermal Institute," and on the right wing, in smaller letters: "Hydro-therapy — Stomachic Ablutions — Pools of Running Water," and, on the left wing: "Medical Institute of Automotive Gymnastics."

Everything was white, with a new, dazzling, raw white-

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ness. Men were still at work, painters, plumbers, and navvies, although the pump-room had already been open for a month.

From the first day the success of the enterprise had surpassed the hopes of its originators. Three great doctors, real celebrities, Professors Mas-Roussel, Cloche, and Rémusot, had taken the new spa under their protection, and had consented to stay for some time in the villas of the Berne Portable Chalet Company, which had been placed at their disposal by the proprietors of the waters.

Under their influence a crowd of patients was flocking to the place, and the Grand Hotel of Mont-Oriol was full.

Although the baths had been open since the beginning of June, the official opening of the spa had been put off till the first of July, in order to attract a large number of people. The celebrations were to begin at three o'clock with the blessing of the springs. In the evening there was to be a gala performance, followed by fireworks and a ball, in order that the local patients might be brought into touch with those from the neighbouring spas and with the leading inhabitants of Clermont-Ferrand and Riom.

The Casino, on the top of the hill, was hidden by flags; nothing was to be seen but a sort of dense, waving mist of blue, red, white, and yellow; at the tops of giant masts planted along the park paths, enormous banners streamed in serpentine curves across the blue sky.

Monsieur Petrus Martel, who had secured the post of manager to the new Casino, imagined himself the all-powerful captain of some fantastic ship, and was giving orders to the white-aproned waiters in the tremendous, resounding voice that admirals must possess to make their commands heard above the roar of cannon. His ringing words, borne by the wind, were audible even in the village.

Andermatt, already out of breath, appeared on the

terrace. Petrus Martel ran to meet him and bowed, with a splendid ample gesture.

“Is everything all right?” inquired the banker.

“Quite all right, sir.”

“If I should be needed, I am to be found in the medical inspector’s study. We are holding a meeting this morning.”

He went back down the hill. At the door of the pump-room the superintendent and the commissionnaire, stolen from the other company, now become the rival company, but already condemned without even the chance of a fight, rushed up to receive their master. The ex-jailer made a military salute, and the other cringed like a beggar receiving alms.

“Is the medical inspector here?” asked Andermatt.

“Yes, sir,” replied the superintendent; “all the gentlemen have arrived.”

The banker entered the corridor through the midst of the patients and respectful attendants, turned to the right, opened a door, and found all the members of the board who were at Enval assembled in a large, solemn-looking room, full of books and busts of scientists; there were his father-in-law the marquis and his brother-in-law Gontran, Paul Brétigny and Doctor Latonne, and the two Oriols, father and son, by now almost full-blown gentlemen; their tall forms were arrayed in such prodigiously long frock-coats that they looked like advertisements for a mourning-outfitter’s.

After a rapid bout of handshaking, they all sat down and Andermatt began to speak.

“One important question remains for us to settle, and that is the name of the springs. Upon this subject I have an opinion entirely different from that of the medical inspector. He proposes to give to our three principal springs the names of the three leading lights of the medical profession who have established themselves here.

That is admittedly a piece of flattery which would appeal to them and win them over even more securely to our side. But you may be sure, gentlemen, that it would alienate from us for ever those of their eminent confrères who have not yet answered our invitation and whom we must convince, at the cost of every possible effort and sacrifice, of the sovereign efficacy of our waters. Yes, gentlemen, human nature is always the same, and we must know it and make use of it. Professors Plantureau, De Larenard, and Pascalis, to mention only three specialists in affections of the stomach and intestines, will never send their patients, their clients, their best clients, their most illustrious clients, the princes and archdukes and celebrities of all sorts, who have provided them with their fortunes and reputations; I say they will never send them to be cured with water from the Mas-Roussel spring, the Cloche spring, or the Rémusot spring. For these clients, and the public in general, would be somewhat disposed to believe that it was Professor Rémusot, Professor Cloche, and Professor Mas-Roussel who have discovered our water and all its therapeutic properties. It is beyond all doubt, gentlemen, that the name of Gubler, with which the chief spring at Châtel-Guyon was baptised, did in the beginning have a harmful effect upon that spa, prosperous as it is to-day, by prejudicing against it some, at any rate, of the great doctors who might have patronised it from its very earliest days.

“I propose, then, that we should simply give my wife’s name to the first spring which we found, and the names of Monsieur Oriol’s daughters to the other two. Thus we shall have the Christiane, Louise, and Charlotte springs. That sounds well; it is very pretty. What is your opinion?”

His suggestion was adopted even by Doctor Latonne, who added:

“And we might ask Messieurs Mas-Roussel, Cloche,

and Rémusot to be godfathers, and give their arms to the godmothers."

"Exactly," said Andermatt. "I will run off and see them. And they will consent; I'll answer for that! Yes, they will certainly accept. Well, then, we meet at three o'clock, at the church, where the procession will be formed."

And he ran off.

The marquis and Gontran followed him almost immediately. Then the two Oriols, both wearing high hats, departed side by side, two solemn, jet-black figures upon the white road. Paul, who had arrived only the night before in order to be present at the celebration, was buttonholed by Doctor Latonne.

"I have detained you, my dear sir," said the doctor, "in order to show you a thing from which I expect marvellous results: my medical institute of automotive gymnastics."

He took him by the arm and led him off. But as soon as they were out in the corridor, a bath-attendant stopped the doctor.

"Monsieur Riquier is waiting for his ablution."

The year before, Doctor Latonne had not had a good word to say for the stomachic ablutions extolled and practised by Doctor Bonnefille in the establishment of which he was the inspector. But time had modified his opinion, and the Baraduc probe had become the favourite instrument of torture of the new inspector, who thrust it with childish glee into the œsophagi of all his patients.

"Have you ever seen that little operation performed?" he asked Paul Brétigny.

"No, never," replied the latter.

"Come and see, then; it is very interesting."

They entered the douche-room, where Monsieur Riquier, the man with the brick-coloured complexion, who, this year, was trying the recently discovered springs just

as every summer he had tried those at all the new spas, was waiting on a wooden chair.

Like some tortured wretch of old time, he was bound and squeezed breathless in a sort of canvas strait-waist-coat, which was meant to preserve his clothes from stains and splashes; he wore the miserable, uneasy, and suffering expression of a patient about to undergo a surgical operation.

As soon as the doctor appeared, the attendant took up a long tube which divided into three near the middle and looked like a snake with a double tail. Then he affixed one of its ends to a little tap connected with the spring. The second was dropped into a glass receptacle destined to contain the liquids which would presently flow from the patient's stomach. With a steady hand the doctor grasped the third arm of this pipe. With a kindly expression he held it to Monsieur Riquier's jaw, put it in his mouth, and, handling it skilfully, slipped it down his throat, thrusting it farther and farther down with his thumb and forefinger, in a soothing and benevolent manner, repeating: "Very good, very good, very good! It's going, going, going, it's going beautifully!"

Monsieur Riquier, with haggard eyes, purple cheeks, and foam on his lips, gasped, choked, and uttered agonised hiccups; clinging desperately to the arms of the chair, he made frantic efforts to vomit out the india-rubber beast that was crawling into his body.

When he had swallowed about half a yard of it, the doctor said:

"Now we're right down. Turn it on."

Thereupon the attendant turned on the tap, and soon the patient's stomach was visibly swollen, gradually filling with water from the spring.

"Cough," said the doctor; "cough, to help it down."

But instead of coughing, the poor man uttered a sort of death-rattle; a violent convulsion shook him; he seemed

on the point of losing his eyes, which were protruding from his head. Then suddenly a slight splashing noise was audible on the floor, by the side of his chair. The siphon of the double pipe was at last beginning to work, and the stomach was now emptying itself into the glass receptacle, in which the doctor eagerly searched for the signs of catarrh and the recognisable traces of uncompleted digestion.

“Never eat peas again,” he said, “nor salad! Oh, no salad! You can’t digest it at all. No strawberries either! I’ve already told you ten times, no strawberries!”

Monsieur Riquier seemed wild with rage. He was now shaking in his chair, unable to speak with his throat corked by the tube. But when the operation was over and the doctor daintily extracted the probe from his inside, he exclaimed:

“Is it my fault if every day I am eating filth that ruins my health? Oughtn’t it to be your business to keep an eye on your manager’s menus? I went to your new dump because I was being poisoned by the abominable food at the old one, and now I’m even worse at your damned great barrack of a Mont-Oriol Hotel, ’pon my word I am!”

The doctor had to calm him, promising him, several times in succession, to take charge of the patients’ food.

Then he took Paul Brétigny’s arm again and led him on, saying:

“Now see upon what extremely sound principles I have founded my special treatment by automotive gymnastics, which we are going to see. You are acquainted with my system of organometrical medicine, are you not? I claim that a large proportion of our maladies are due solely to the excessive development of some organ, which encroaches upon its neighbour, impedes its functions, and in a short time destroys the general harmony of the body, thus giving rise to the most serious disorders.

“Now exercise, together with douches and thermal

treatment, is one of the most vigorous methods of re-establishing the proper equilibrium and reducing the encroaching parts to their normal proportions.

"But how are you to make a man take exercise?"

"There is not only considerable physical effort in the act of walking, riding, swimming, or rowing; there is also the much more important moral effort. It is the mind which controls, spurs on, and sustains the body. All energetic men are men of active disposition! Energy resides in the soul, and not in the muscles. The body obeys the vigorous will."

"No one need dream of giving courage to the coward or resolution to the weak-minded. But we can do another thing, we can do more: we can abolish courage, abolish mental energy, and permit nothing but the physical movement. I replace the moral effort by the more efficient substitute of an external and purely mechanical force! Do you understand? Not quite! Let us go in!"

He opened a door which led into a large room in which a number of strange instruments stood alined. There were large arm-chairs with wooden legs, clumsy horses made of deal, hinged planks, and movable bars fastened in front of chairs fixed to the ground. And all these objects were fitted with complicated gears worked by cranks.

"There," continued the doctor, "we have four principal exercises which I shall call the natural exercises; they are: walking, riding, swimming, and rowing. Each of these exercises develops different parts of the body and acts in its own special way. Now here we have all four, artificially produced. You have nothing to do but be passive and think of nothing, and you can run, ride, swim, or row for an hour without the mind's taking the slightest part in this entirely muscular labour."

At that moment Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur came in, followed by a man whose rolled-up sleeves displayed sturdy

biceps. The engineer had grown even fatter. He panted as he walked, with widely straddling thighs and his arms held out from his body.

"You shall learn all about it as an actual eye-witness," said the doctor, and, turning to his patient, continued:

"Well, my dear sir, and what are we to do to-day? Walking or riding?"

Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur, who was shaking hands with Paul, replied:

"I should like a little seated walking; it tires me less."

"Yes," replied Monsieur Latonne, "you see, we have two sorts of walking, seated or standing. The standing variety, the more efficacious of the two, is rather exhausting. I secure it be means of pedals upon which the patient stands and by which his legs are set in motion, while he keeps his balance by clinging to rings fastened to the wall. But this is the seated walking."

The engineer had sunk into a rocking-chair, and laid his legs along the jointed wooden legs attached to the seat. His ankles, calves, and thighs were strapped down so tightly that he could perform no voluntary movement; then the man with the turned-up sleeves seized the crank and turned it with all his might. At first the chair swung to and fro like a hammock, then suddenly the legs began to work, swinging out and back with great speed.

"He is running," said the doctor, and ordered:

"Gently, a walking pace."

The attendant slowed down, imposing upon the fat engineer a less violent seated walk, which ridiculously distorted all the movements of his body.

Two more patients then appeared, both enormously stout, and also followed by two bare-armed attendants.

They were hoisted on to wooden horses which were set in motion and immediately began to leap up and down on the spot, shaking their riders abominably.

"Gallop!" said the doctor. And the artificial animals,

leaping like waves and pitching like ships in a storm, so exhausted the two patients that both began to cry in miserable, breathless tones:

“Enough! Enough! I can’t stand any more! Enough!”

“Stop!” commanded the doctor, and added: “Have a short rest to regain your breath. You will begin again in five minutes.”

Paul Brétigny, who was choking with suppressed laughter, remarked to him that the riders were not hot, whereas the men who turned the cranks were streaming with sweat.

“Would it not be better,” he said, “if you were to interchange their rôles?”

“Not at all,” replied the doctor gravely. “You must not confuse exercise with fatigue. The movement of the man turning the wheel is a bad one, while the movement of the man walking or riding is excellent.”

But Paul noticed a side-saddle.

“Yes,” said the doctor, “the afternoon is reserved for ladies. Men are not admitted after twelve in the morning. Now come and see the dry swimming.”

An arrangement of movable planks screwed together at their extremities and centres, capable of being stretched out into diamond shapes or compressed into squares, like the familiar child’s toy with soldiers fixed upon it, made it possible for three swimmers to be fettered and torn asunder at once.

“I need not boast to you,” said the doctor, “of the advantages of dry swimming, which wets the body only with perspiration, and consequently does not expose the imaginary bather to any risk of rheumatic trouble.”

But a waiter came up to him, with a card in his hand.

“The Duc de Ramas, my dear sir; I must leave you. Pray excuse me.”

Paul, left alone, turned back. The two riders were trotting again. Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur was still walk-

ing; and the three natives were panting for breath, their arms pulled out of their sockets and their backs ready to break with the shaking they were giving their patients. They looked as though they were grinding coffee.

When he came out into the open air again, Brétigny perceived Doctor Honorat, watching, with his wife, the preparations for the festivities. They began to chat, gazing at the flags that formed a halo about the hill.

"Is it at the church that the procession is being formed?" asked the doctor's wife.

"Yes, at the church."

"At three o'clock?"

"Yes, at three o'clock."

"Will the professors be there?"

"Yes. They will be with the godmothers of the springs."

Next the Pailles stopped him, and then the Monécus, father and daughter. But Paul had arranged to lunch alone with his friend Gontran at the *Café du Casino*, whither he slowly ascended. Having arrived only the previous night, Paul had not been alone with his friend for a month, and he had a fine stock of smoking-room stories to tell him, tales of chorus-girls and gambling-hells.

They stayed there, chatting, till half past two, when Petrus Martel warned them that people were now on their way to the church.

"Let us go and fetch Christiane," said Gontran.

"Yes, let's," replied Paul.

They found her standing on the steps of the new hotel. She had the sunken cheeks and bistred complexion which accompany pregnancy, and her greatly swollen figure showed that she was at least six months gone with child.

"I was waiting for you," she said. "William has gone on ahead. He has so much to do to-day.

She cast a glance full of love at Paul Brétigny, and took his arm.

They set off slowly, picking their way through the stones.

"How heavy I am!" she said repeatedly. "How heavy I am! I can't walk. I am so afraid of falling!"

He did not answer, and supported her carefully, making no attempt to meet her eyes, which she kept constantly turned towards him.

A tightly packed crowd was waiting in front of the church.

"Here you are at last, then!" cried Andermatt. "Hurry up. Now this is the order of the procession: Two choir-boys, two precentors in surplices, the cross, the holy water, the priest, then Christiane with Professor Cloche, Mademoiselle Louise with Professor Rémusot, and Mademoiselle Charlotte with Professor Mas-Roussel. After them the board of directors, the doctors, and then the general public. Is that clear? Off we go!"

The ecclesiastical element then came out of the church and took the head of the procession. Then a tall gentleman with white hair brushed back behind his ears, the typical classical sage of the academic pattern, went up to Madame Andermatt and made a deep bow.

When he had restored himself to an upright position, he walked off beside her, bare-headed, to show his beautiful scientific head of hair, holding his hat against his thigh. He wore a superb air of dignity, as though the Comédie-Française had taught him to walk and display to the public his Legion of Honour rosette, which was too large for a modest man.

He opened a conversation:

"Your husband, madame, was recently speaking to me about you and about your condition, which causes him no little affectionate anxiety. He has told me of

your ignorance and doubts as to the probable time of your delivery."

She blushed to the temples.

"Yes," she murmured, "I thought I was to become a mother long before I really was. And now, I don't know . . . I don't know . . ."

She stammered in utter confusion.

"This spa has a very great future before it; I am already obtaining remarkable effects," said a voice behind her. It was Professor Rémusot, talking to his companion, Louise Oriol. This doctor was a small man with ill-kempt yellow hair, a badly cut frock-coat, and the greasy appearance of a slovenly pedant.

Professor Mas-Roussel, who was walking arm in arm with Charlotte Oriol, was a handsome doctor, beardless and moustacheless, smiling, well groomed, a little stout, but with hardly a trace of grey in his hair. His placid shaven face resembled neither a priest's nor an actor's, as Doctor Latonne's did.

Next came the board of directors, led by Andermatt and dominated by the Oriol's enormous hats.

Behind them marched another company of high hats, the medical corps of Enval. Doctor Bonnefille was missing from among them, but was replaced by two new doctors, Doctor Black, an old man so short as to be almost a dwarf, and whose extreme piety had amazed the entire neighbourhood from the day of his arrival; and a handsome, well set-up young fellow wearing a bowler hat, Doctor Mazelli, an Italian attached to the person of the Duc de Ramas, some said to the Duchess's.

And behind these came the general public, a host of people, patients, natives, and inhabitants of the neighbouring towns.

The blessing of the springs was a very brief affair. The Reverend Monsieur Litre sprinkled them, one after another, with the holy water, making Doctor Honorat

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observe that it was going to give them new properties in addition to the sodium chloride. Then all the specially invited guests went into the great reading-room, where a collation was served.

"How pretty the Oriol girls have grown!" said Paul to Gontran.

"They're charming, my dear."

"You haven't seen the president, have you, gentlemen?" asked the ex-jailer suddenly, coming up to the young men.

"Yes, he's over there in the corner."

"Well, old Clovis has got a crowd round him at the door."

Already, on the way to the blessing of the springs, the entire procession had filed past the old cripple, who had been cured the year before and had by this time become more paralytic than ever. He would stop strangers on the road, preferably the new arrivals, and tell them his story:

"You see, these games don't do no good; they cure you right enough, and then they get you bad again, so bad you're nigh dead. My legs were getting better, but now, after the cure, I'm losing my arms. And my legs are like iron; iron you'd have to cut — you couldn't bend them."

Andermatt, in great distress, had tried to have him put in prison on a charge of slandering the Mont-Oriol waters and attempted blackmail. But he had succeeded neither in getting a verdict against him nor in shutting his mouth.

As soon as he learned that the old man was talking at the pump-room door, he rushed out to make him stop.

At the side of the main road, in the middle of a crowd, he heard angry voices. Everyone was thronging round to hear and see what it was all about. Ladies were asking: "What is it?" and men replying: "A sick man who

has been finished off by the waters here." Others thought that a child had been run over. There was also talk of a poor woman's having an epileptic fit.

Andermatt cleaved his way through the crowd in the successful way he had, violently squeezing his little round stomach against the stomachs of the crowd. "It proves," Gontran used to say, "the superiority of the sphere over the point."

Old Clovis, sitting at the roadside, was bewailing his woes, snivelling over his sufferings, while the two exasperated Oriols, standing in front of him and separating him from the crowd, were loudly cursing and threatening him.

"It's not true," said Colosse; "he's a liar, a cheat, a poacher; he runs about the woods all night."

But the old man, without losing his temper, kept repeating in a little, shrill voice heard above the vociferations of the two men:

"They've killed me, kind sirs, they've killed me with their water. They bathed me by force last year. And look at me now, look at me, look at me!"

Andermatt imposed a general silence, and, bending over the cripple and gazing into his eyes, said:

"Now look here, if you're worse, it's your own fault. But listen to me, and I'll guarantee to cure you in fifteen or twenty more baths at the most. Come and see me in an hour's time at the pump-room, when everybody has gone, and we'll settle all about it. And while you're waiting, keep your mouth shut."

The old man had understood. He was silent for a short time, and then replied:

"I don't mind trying. We'll see."

Andermatt took the arms of the two Oriols and led them hastily away, while old Clovis remained lying on the grass, between his crutches, at the side of the road, blinking in the sunlight.

The excited crowd pressed round him. Gentlemen questioned him, but he did not answer them, behaving as though he had not heard or did not understand. Their curiosity, useless now, ended by annoying him, and he began to sing at the top of his voice an interminable song in unintelligible dialect, bawling unspeakably shrilly and unspeakably out of tune.

Gradually the crowd melted away. Only a few children remained, and stood watching him for a long time, with their fingers on their noses.

Christiane, who was very tired, had gone in to rest; Paul and Gontran walked about the new park among the visitors. Suddenly they perceived the troop of actors, which had also deserted the old casino to attach itself to the rising fortunes of the new one.

Mademoiselle Odelin, grown vastly elegant, was walking arm in arm with her mother, who had acquired an air of much importance. Monsieur Petitnivelle, of the Vaudeville Theatre, was very attentive to the two ladies, who were followed by Monsieur Lapalme of the Grand Theatre, Bordeaux, talking with the musicians; these were still the same, the maestro Saint-Landri, Javel the pianist, Noirot the flautist, and Nicordi the double-bass.

At sight of Paul and Gontran, Saint-Landri rushed up to them. During the winter, he had had a little musical piece performed at a very small suburban theatre; but the papers had spoken of him with some favour, and now he spoke patronisingly of Massenet, Reyer, and Gounod.

He gave them his hands with impulsive kindness and simultaneously narrated the discussion he had been having with the gentlemen of the orchestra of which he was conductor.

“Yes, it’s all up with the back numbers of the old school; they’re done for. The melodists have had their day, and that’s what nobody can be got to realise.

“Music is a new art. Melody is its first infantile lisp-

ings. The ignorant ear has always loved refrains, and took a childish savage pleasure in them. The ears of the untutored mob, the simple ear, will always love little songs; they'll always love tunes. It's an amusement comparable to that experienced at *café* concerts.

"In order to make myself understood, let me use a comparison. The rustic eye loves brutal colours and gaudy pictures; the eye of the educated but not artistic middle class loves pleasantly pretentious shades of lighting and sentimental subjects; but the artistic eye, the cultured eye, loves, understands, and appreciates the elusive modulations of a single shade and the mysterious harmonies of tone which remain invisible to the world as a whole.

"It is the same with literature: porters like stories of adventure, the middle class like sentimental novels, and the truly literary people like only the books of real artistry, incomprehensible to the rest.

"When a middle-class man starts talking music to me, I want to kill him. And when he does it at the opera, I ask him:

"'Can you tell me whether the third violin played a wrong note in the overture to the third act?' — 'No.' — 'Then keep your mouth shut. You've no ear. A man who cannot simultaneously hear the whole orchestra together and each instrument separately has no ear and is no musician. That's all! Good evening!'"

He spun round on his heel, and continued:

"For an artist, all music is in some sort of harmony. And ah, how some harmonies madden me, pouring a flood of inexpressible happiness right through my body! My ear is now so practised, so ripe, that I am even coming to love certain discords, like a connoisseur whose maturity of taste has degenerated into decadence. I am beginning to be a debauchee, seeking the extreme sensation of the ear. Ah, yes, my friends, what delight, what

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perverse yet profound delight there is in some wrong notes! How exquisitely they grate upon the nerves, and tickle and scratch the ear! . . . ”

He rubbed his hands in delight, and crooned:

“You shall hear my opera — my opera, my opera — you shall hear my opera.”

“You are composing an opera?” asked Gontran

“Yes, I have nearly finished it.”

But Petrus Martel’s quarterdeck voice resounded far and wide.

“You understand! It is all arranged: a yellow maroon and you will begin.”

He was giving orders for the fireworks. They joined him, and he explained his arrangements, pointing with outstretched arm, as though threatening an enemy fleet, towards some white wooden posts on the mountain, above the gorge, on the far side of the valley.

“They will send them up from there. I was telling my man to be at his post by half past eight. As soon as the gala performance is over, I shall give the signal from here by a yellow maroon, and then he will light the first piece.”

The marquis appeared.

“I am going to drink a glass of water,” he said.

Paul and Gontran accompanied him down the hill. As they reached the pump-room, they saw old Clovis going in, supported by the two Oriols, and followed by Andermatt and the doctor. Whenever his legs dragged along the ground, he executed convulsions expressive of great pain.

“Let us go in,” said Gontran. “It will be funny.”

The cripple was placed in an arm-chair, and Andermatt addressed him:

“This is what I propose, you old scamp. You will be cured immediately by taking two baths every day. And you shall have two hundred francs as soon as you walk.”

"My legs, they're iron, kind gentleman," groaned the cripple.

Andermatt made him be silent, and continued:

"Listen, will you? . . . And you shall have two hundred francs as well every year till your death . . . do you hear? . . . till your death, if you continue to experience the salutary effects of our water."

The old man was perplexed. A lasting cure would upset all his arrangements for getting a livelihood.

"But when . . ." he asked hesitatingly, "when your place is shut . . . if I get bad again . . . I can't do anything . . . if it's shut . . . your water. . . ."

Doctor Latonne interrupted him, and turned to Andermatt:

"Splendid . . . ! Splendid . . . ! We'll cure him every year . . . that will be much better, and will prove the need for an annual treatment, and the indispensability of coming back every year. Splendid, isn't it?"

But the old man had begun whining again:

"It won't be easy this time, kind gentlemen. My legs are like iron, iron bars. . . ."

A new idea was budding in the doctor's brain.

"If I were to give him a course of seated walking," he said, "I might greatly accelerate the effect of the water. It is worth trying."

"An excellent idea," replied Andermatt, and added: "Now, Clovis, off you go, and don't forget our agreement."

The old man departed, still groaning; and, as evening was drawing on, all the directors of the Mont-Oriol enterprise returned home for dinner, for the gala performance had been advertised to begin at half past seven.

It took place in the great hall of the new Casino, which could hold a thousand people.

From seven o'clock onwards the spectators who had not reserved seats began to arrive.

At half past seven the hall was full, and the curtain rose on a farce in two acts preceding Saint-Landri's operetta, performed by singers from Vichy lent for the occasion.

Christiane was sitting in the front row, between her father and her husband, and found the heat very trying.

"I cannot bear it any longer," she kept repeating.

After the farce, when the operetta was beginning, she was nearly taken ill.

"My dear Will," she said, turning to her husband, "I shall have to go out. I cannot breathe!"

The banker was much distressed. He was determined that the festivities should at all costs go off absolutely without a hitch.

"Struggle against it with all your might, I beg you," he replied. "If you went out, it would spoil everything. You would have to walk through the entire hall."

But Gontran, sitting behind with Paul, had overheard. He leant over and addressed his sister:

"You are too hot?"

"Yes, I cannot breathe."

"Right. Wait. You will laugh."

A window was close at hand. He crept to it, mounted upon a chair, and jumped out, almost unnoticed.

Then he entered the empty café, put his hand under the counter, where he had seen Petrus Martel hide the signal maroon, stole it, ran out, and, hiding in a shrubbery, lit it.

The yellow sheaf of light fled up towards the clouds, trailing a long stream of sparks across the sky.

Almost immediately a loud report was heard from the hill-side opposite, and a cluster of stars was scattered over the dark sky.

"They are letting off the fireworks," cried someone in the hall where Saint-Landri's harmonies were quivering.

The spectators nearest to the doors rose hurriedly and

tiptoed out to make sure. All the others looked towards the windows, but could see nothing, for they faced the Limagne.

“Is it true? Is it true?” everyone kept asking.

A wave of excitement ran through the impatient crowd, always particularly greedy for simple amusements.

“Yes, they really are letting them off,” announced a voice from outside.

In a moment the whole audience was on its feet. Everyone rushed to the doors, jostling and bawling: “Hurry up, do hurry up,” at those who obstructed their exit.

Soon they were all out in the park. Left alone, the exasperated Saint-Landri continued to beat time to his inattentive orchestra. And outside, amid volleys of squibs, catherine-wheels and Roman candles followed one another.

Suddenly a stentorian voice was thrice uplifted in the wild cry:

“For God’s sake, stop! For God’s sake, stop! For God’s sake, stop!”

And, as an immense sheet of Bengal fire flamed up on the hill-side, casting a red glare on the great rocks and trees on the right, and a blue glare on the left, the frantic figure of Petrus Martel appeared, standing in one of the imitation-marble vases that adorned the Casino terrace, bare-headed and with arms outstretched, gesticulating and yelling.

Then the glare died down and nothing was to be seen but the real stars. But immediately another firework went off and Petrus Martel jumped down on to the ground, crying:

“What a disaster! What a disaster! My God, what a disaster!”

And, brandishing his fists tragically and stamping with rage, he joined the crowd, still repeating:

“What a disaster! My God, what a disaster!”

Christiane had taken Paul's arm and had gone to sit in the open air. She was gazing delightedly at the rockets soaring up into the sky.

Suddenly her brother returned and said:

"Well, has it been a success? Don't you think it was a good joke?"

"What, was it you?" she murmured.

"Yes, it was I. Rather good, wasn't it?"

She burst out laughing, for she thought it really was funny. But Andermatt came up in great distress. He could not think how the disaster had come about. The maroon had been stolen from under the counter in order that the signal might be given. Such an outrage could only be laid at the door of the old company, of an emissary of Doctor Bonnefille's.

"It's heart-breaking," he kept saying, "positively heart-breaking. Two thousand three hundred francs' worth of fireworks wasted, absolutely wasted."

"No," replied Gontran, "rightly reckoned, the loss does not amount to more than a quarter, or, say, a third of that sum; that is, seven hundred and sixty-six francs. So your guests will have enjoyed fifteen hundred and thirty-two francs' worth of rockets, which isn't so bad."

The banker's fury was turned upon his brother-in-law. He took him roughly by the arm, saying:

"I've something serious to say to you. Now that I have you, let us walk round the park. I can spare five minutes." He turned to Christiane:

"I entrust you to our friend Brétigny, my dear; but don't stay out long, be careful of yourself. You might catch cold, you know. Do be careful!"

"You need not be alarmed, dear," she murmured.

And Andermatt led Gontran away.

As soon as they were alone, some little distance from the crowd, the banker halted.

"I want to speak to you about your financial position."

"My financial position?"

"Yes. Do you know what it is?"

"No. But you ought to know it for me; you have been lending me money."

"Yes, I do know it, and that is why I am speaking to you about it."

"At least you seem to have chosen a poor occasion... in the middle of a firework display!"

"On the contrary, the occasion is very well chosen. I am not speaking in the middle of a firework display, but before a ball"

"Before a ball? . . . I don't understand."

"Well, you will in a moment. This is your position: you have nothing but debts, and you never will have anything but debts."

"You put it rather crudely," replied Gontran gravely.

"Yes, it is necessary. Now listen: you have run through your share of your mother's fortune. We'll say no more about that."

"We'll say no more about that."

"As for your father, he has an income of thirty thousand francs, that is, a capital of about eight hundred thousand francs. Your share of it, later on, will therefore be four hundred thousand francs. Now you owe me a hundred and ninety thousand francs. Besides that you owe money-lenders"

"Call them Jews," murmured Gontran loftily.

"All right, Jews, then, although one of them is a Saint-Sulpice churchwarden who used a priest as an intermediary between the two of you . . . but I won't quibble over such a trifle. . . . You owe, then, to various money-lenders, Israelitish or Catholic, about the same amount. Let us put it at one hundred and fifty thousand, at the lowest estimate. That makes a total of three hundred and forty thousand francs, on which

you pay the interest by perpetual borrowing, except for my share, on which you pay no interest at all."

"That is correct," said Gontran.

"Therefore, you have nothing left."

"Yes, nothing . . . except my brother-in-law."

"Except your brother-in-law, and he has had quite enough of lending you money."

"Well, then?"

"Then, my friend, the poorest peasant in one of those huts yonder is richer than you."

"Exactly. . . . And what then?"

"What then? . . . If your father were to die to-morrow, you would have no other means left of getting your daily bread but to accept a post as a clerk in my office. And even that would only be another way of disguising the pension I should be giving you."

"My dear William," replied Gontran irritably, "these matters bore me. Anyhow, I am as well acquainted with the facts as you are, and, I say again, you have not chosen a good occasion to remind me of them with . . . with so little tact"

"Please allow me to finish. You can only extricate yourself by a marriage. Now you are deplorably ineligible, in spite of your name, which sounds well, without being truly illustrious. I mean, it is not such as to command the fortune of an heiress, even an Israelite heiress. So you must find a wealthy and acceptable wife, and that is not very easy"

"You had better tell me her name at once," interrupted Gontran.

"Very well, I will: one of old Oriol's daughters, whichever you fancy. And that is why I am speaking to you before the ball."

"And now, please explain yourself more fully," replied Gontran coldly.

"It is very simple. You see how successful I have

been with this watering-place, right from the start. Now, if I had in my hands, or, rather, if we had in our hands, all the land kept back by that sly old devil of a peasant, I could make it worth its weight in gold. Only to mention the vineyards between the pump-room and the hotel and between the hotel and the Casino, I would pay a million for them to-morrow, like a shot. Now those vineyards and the others all round the hill will be the daughters' marriage portions. Their father told me so the other day, perhaps not without a purpose. Well . . . if you were willing, we might make a big thing out of it, both of us?"

"It is possible," murmured Gontran, with an air as of contemplation; "I will think about it."

"Yes, do, and do not forget that I only speak about things I'm sure of, after giving a great deal of thought to them, and reckoning up all the possible consequences and all the inevitable profits."

But Gontran, as though he had suddenly forgotten all that his brother-in-law had been saying to him, raised his arm and exclaimed:

"Look! How fine!"

The set-piece was being lighted, portraying a palace of fire over which a blazing flag bore the word "Mont-Oriol" in letters of scarlet flame; opposite it, above the plain, the moon, likewise red, seemed risen to gaze at the spectacle. And when the palace, after burning for some minutes, exploded like a ship blowing up, showering across the firmament a trail of fantastic stars that exploded in their turn, the moon remained alone, calm and round on the horizon.

"Hurrah! Bravo! Bravo!" cried the crowd, applauding frantically.

"Come and open the ball, my dear boy," said Andermatt suddenly. "Will you dance the first quadrille opposite me?"

"Yes, certainly I will."

"Whom do you mean to ask? I have engaged the Duchess de Ramas."

"I shall ask Charlotte Oriol," replied Gontran, with an air of indifference.

They returned up the hill. As they passed the spot where Christiane had remained with Paul Brétigny, they saw that they were no longer there.

"She has taken my advice and gone off to bed," murmured William. "She has been very tired all day."

He went on towards the ball-room, that the servants had been making ready during the fireworks.

But Christiane had not gone up to her room, as her husband thought.

As soon as she felt herself alone with Paul, she had gripped his hand and whispered:

"So you have come at last; I have been waiting for a month. Every morning I would ask myself: 'Shall I see him to-day?' . . . And every evening I would say to myself: 'It will be to-morrow, then?' . . . Why have you waited so long, my love?"

"I was detained, busy," he murmured, embarrassed.

She bent over him. "It was not kind of you," she murmured, "to leave me alone here, with them, especially in my condition."

He slightly withdrew his chair:

"Be careful, we might be seen. Those rockets light up the whole place."

She paid no attention.

"I love you so," she said, and, trembling with delight, went on: "Oh, how happy I am, how happy I am that we are here again together! Think of it, Paul! You do, don't you? And what bliss it all is, and how we will love one another once more!"

She sighed so faintly that it seemed but a deep breath.

"I long to kiss you, you cannot think how wildly. I have not seen you for so long!"

Then, suddenly, with the violent, passionate energy of a woman, the passionate energy to which all must yield, she burst out:

"Listen, I want . . . are you listening? . . . I want to go with you now, at once, to the place where we bade one another good-bye, last year! You remember, on the Roche-Pradière road?"

"But it's idiotic," he replied in amazement; "you could not walk another step. You have been on your legs all day! It's idiotic, and I won't allow it."

She had risen, and repeated:

"I wish it. If you will not come with me, I shall go alone. Look!" she added, pointing to the rising moon. "It was just such a night as this! You remember, when you kissed my shadow?"

He held her back:

"Christiane . . . listen . . . it's ridiculous . . . Christiane."

She did not answer, and walked towards the hill that dipped down to the vineyards. He knew her calm will that nothing could turn aside, the pretty obstinacy in the blue eyes and fair little brow, that no obstacle could stop; he took her arm to support her on the way.

"If we were seen, Christiane?"

"You did not say that last year. And besides, everyone is at the fête. We shall be back before our absence is noticed."

Soon it was necessary to ascend the stony path. She panted for breath, leaning upon him with all her strength; at every step she kept saying:

"Oh! How good it is to suffer thus!"

He halted, anxious to carry her. But she would not hear of it.

"No, no. I am happy. You don't understand. . . .

Listen . . . I can feel him stirring . . . our child . . . your child . . . what happiness! . . . Give me your hand. . . . There . . . can you feel him? . . .”

She did not realise that the man was of the lover type, and not in the least of the father type. Ever since he had known her to be with child, he had kept away from her, and, in spite of himself, was disgusted by her. He had often said, in former days, that a woman who had performed the functions of reproduction was no longer worthy of love. That which exalted him in love was the flight of two hearts towards an inaccessible ideal, the intertwining of two immaterial souls, all the artificial and unrealisable qualities with which the poets have endowed passion. In the physical woman he adored the Venus whose sacred flanks must always preserve the pure form of sterility. The idea of a little creature born of her flesh, a mite of humanity stirring in the body she had defiled, and which was already grown ugly, inspired him with an almost unconquerable repulsion. Maternity was turning this woman into a beast. She was no longer the unique creature of his adoring dreams, but the animal reproducing its species. And a measure even of physical disgust mingled with his spiritual repugnance.

How could she have felt or guessed this, she who by every tremor of her longed-for child was bound more closely to her lover? The man she adored, the man she had loved a little more every day since the hour of their first kiss, had not only penetrated to the depths of her heart, but had now entered into her innermost flesh and sowed there his own life, and would presently come forth, born again as a little child. Yes, she was carrying him there, beneath her crossed hands, her very Paul, her kind, dear, loving Paul, her only friend, reborn in her womb by nature's mystery. And she had a twofold love for him, now that she possessed him twice over, the grown

Paul and the little Paul — as yet unknown — the man she saw and touched and embraced, and whose words she heard, and him whom as yet she could but feel stirring within her.

They came out on to the main road.

“You waited for me over there, that evening,” she said, and offered him her lips. He kissed them without answering; it was a frigid kiss.

“Do you remember,” she murmured for the second time, “how you kissed me, on the ground? We were like this: look!”

And in the hope that he would begin again, she began to run away from him. Then she stopped, panting, and stood waiting in the middle of the road. But the moon, magnifying her outline upon the ground, drew thereon the swelling of her deformed body. And Paul, gazing down at the shadow of her pregnancy, remained motionless in front of her, wounded in his sense of decency and beauty, and exasperated that she herself did not feel the same repugnance, did not guess his thoughts, and had not sufficient feminine artistry, tact, and delicacy to appreciate the fine shades that so alter circumstances.

“Really, Christiane,” he said impatiently, “these childish games are absurd.”

She came back to him, moved to sadness, and with open arms she flung herself on his breast.

“Oh, you love me less! I feel it! I am sure of it!”

He took pity on her; holding her head in his hands, he set two long kisses upon her eyes.

Then they returned in silence. He could think of nothing to say to her, and as she leaned on him, exhausted with fatigue, he quickened his pace, so as not to feel too long against his side the touch of her swollen body.

They separated as they drew near to the hotel, and she mounted to her room.

The Casino orchestra was playing dance tunes, and Paul went to look at the ball. It was a waltz, and all were dancing: Doctor Latonne with the younger Madame Paille, Andermatt with Louise Oriol, the handsome Doctor Mazelli with the Duchess de Ramas, and Gontran with Charlotte Oriol. He was whispering into her ear, with the tender air that begins a courtship, and she was smiling behind her fan, blushing with apparent pleasure.

“Look at Monsieur de Ravenel making love to my patient,” Paul heard a voice say just behind him. It was Doctor Honorat, standing near the door, amusing himself with watching.

“Yes,” he continued, “it’s been going on for half an hour. Everyone has noticed it already. The girl doesn’t appear to object to it, either.”

“The girl’s a pearl,” he added, after a pause; “good, merry, simple, devoted, and straightforward; a splendid little thing. She’s worth ten of her elder sister. I’ve known them since they were children. . . . And yet their father prefers the elder, because she is more . . . more like himself . . . more rustic . . . less straightforward . . . more economical in her ways . . . more cunning . . . and more . . . more jealous. . . . Oh, she’s a good enough girl! . . . I wouldn’t say a word against her . . . but I can’t help comparing them, you know . . . and, when I have compared them . . . I judge . . . that’s all.”

The waltz was ending, and Gontran joined his friend.

“I say,” he said, perceiving the doctor, “the medical society of Enval has had some curious additions to it, hasn’t it? We have a Monsieur Mazelli who waltzes sublimely, and a little old Monsieur Black who seems to be on excellent terms with Heaven.”

But Doctor Honorat was discreet. He never liked to pass judgment on his colleagues.

II

THE question of the Enval doctors was by now a burning one. They had swiftly got possession of the district, commanding all the inhabitants' attention and interest. Formerly the springs had flowed under the authority of Doctor Bonnefille alone, amid the inoffensive animosities of the energetic Doctor Latonne and the placid Doctor Honorat.

Now, it was a very different state of affairs.

Ever since the success planned during the winter by Andermatt had been thoroughly realised, thanks to the all-powerful presence of Professors Cloche, Mas-Roussel, and Rémusot, who had each brought a contingent of at least two or three hundred patients, Doctor Latonne, inspector of the new pump-room, had become a most important personage, patronised especially by Professor Mas-Roussel, whose pupil he had been and whose dress and mannerisms he imitated.

Doctor Bonnefille was quite out of it. Wild with exasperation, and violently inveighing against Mont-Oriol, the old doctor remained all day long in the old pump-room with a few old patients who had remained faithful.

In the opinion of some of his clients, he alone knew the true properties of the water; he, so to speak, possessed the secret of them, since he had been officially dispensing them ever since the founding of the spa.

Doctor Honorat retained only the local clientele. He was contented with this mediocre fortune, and remained on good terms with everyone, consoling himself with his

preference for cards and white wine over medicine of all sorts. He did not, however, go so far as to love his colleagues.

Doctor Latonne would thus have remained the great prophet of Mont-Oriol, had it not been for the arrival one morning of a very small man, almost a dwarf, whose large head, sunk between the shoulders, great round eyes, and huge hands presented a creature of very strange appearance. This new doctor, Monsieur Black, brought into the district by Professor Rémusot, had immediately attracted attention by his extreme piety.

Almost every morning, between two calls, he would go into the church for a few minutes, and almost every Sunday he went to communion. Soon the priest gave him some patients, poor old maids whom he attended free, pious ladies who took the advice of their spiritual director before calling in a man of science, whose sentiments, reserve, and professional modesty they insisted on knowing before anything else.

Then one day the arrival was announced of the Princesse de Maldebourg, an old German Highness, a fervent Catholic who called in Doctor Black on the very evening of her arrival, upon the recommendation of a Roman cardinal.

From that moment he was in the fashion. It became the correct, the smart thing to go to him. He was the only doctor of perfect behaviour, people said, the only one in whom a woman could have complete confidence.

From morning to night he was to be seen running from one hotel to another, the little man with a bulldog's head who was always whispering in corners with everybody. He always seemed to have some important secret to disclose or receive, for he was to be found in corridors, having mysterious interviews with hotel-keepers and his patients' maids, and with anyone who had any dealings with his clients.

In the street, whenever he perceived any of his acquaintances, he would go straight up to them and immediately proceed to mumble new and detailed recommendations to them, like a priest hearing confession.

The old women in particular adored him. He heard them out to the end without interruption and took notes of all their observations, inquiries, and requests.

Every day he augmented or diminished his patients' doses of water, and this gave them complete confidence in the care he took of them.

"We remained at two glasses and three-quarters yesterday," he would say; "very well, to-day we will take only two glasses and a half, and to-morrow three glasses. . . . Do not forget . . . three glasses to-morrow. . . . I make a particular point of that!"

And all his patients were convinced that he really did!

In order not to forget these numbers and fractions, he wrote them down in a note-book, so as not to make mistakes. For a patient never forgives an error of half a glass.

With the same minuteness, he regulated and modified the duration of the daily baths, by virtue of principles known to himself alone.

"He's a humbug," Doctor Latonne would declare, shrugging his shoulders in jealous exasperation.

His hatred of Doctor Black had even led him occasionally to speak ill of mineral waters.

"Since we hardly know how they act, it is quite impossible to prescribe daily modifications in the doses, which no therapeutic law can regulate. Such procedure does the greatest harm to the science of medicine."

Doctor Honorat was content with smiling. He was always careful to forget, five minutes after a consultation, the number of glasses he had just prescribed.

"Two more or less," he would say to Gontran, in his

lighter moments; "only the spring will notice, and it won't mind."

The only malicious pleasantry which he indulged in against his religious colleague consisted in calling him "St. Sitz-bath's doctor." His jealousy was prudent, bantering and tranquil.

Sometimes he would add:

"Oh, he knows his patients through and through! . . . and that's even better than knowing the disease!"

But one morning there arrived at the Mont-Oriol Hotel a noble Spanish family, the Duke and Duchess de Ramas-Aldavarra, bringing with them their doctor, an Italian, Doctor Mazelli, of Milan.

He was a man of thirty, tall and slender, a very handsome young fellow, clean-shaven except for a moustache.

On the very first evening he made a conquest of the entire company, for the duke, a melancholy man, afflicted with monstrous obesity, had a horror of solitude and insisted on eating in the ordinary dining-room. Doctor Mazelli already knew almost all the visitors by name; he had a pleasant word for every man, a compliment for every woman, a smile even for every servant.

Sitting on the right of the duchess, a handsome woman of between thirty-five and forty, with a pale complexion, black eyes, and blue-black hair, he would say to her at every course: "Very little," or "None of this," or "Yes, you may eat this." And he himself would pour out her drink, with the greatest care, measuring precisely the proportions of the wine and the water which he mixed with it.

He also regulated the duke's food, but with obvious negligence. Besides, his patient took no notice of his advice, but ate everything with bestial voracity, and drank two bottles of wine neat at each meal, after which he would collapse into a chair in the open, at the door of

the hotel, and would proceed to groan with pain and complain of his digestion.

After the first dinner, Doctor Mazelli, who with one glance had made up his mind about everyone present, went off to the terrace of the Casino in search of Gontran, who was smoking a cigar there; he made himself known to him and began to talk.

At the end of an hour they were intimate with one another. Next morning he got himself presented to Christiane as she was leaving the pump-room; in ten minutes he gained her interest and goodwill, and introduced her the same day to the duchess, who did not like solitude any better than her husband.

He looked after everything in the Spanish household, giving the chef excellent advice on cooking, and the maid precious information on how to preserve the brilliance, exquisite colour, and abundance of her mistress's hair, and the coachman valuable instruction in veterinary surgery. He was an expert in the invention of distractions to make time pass quickly and easily, and in hotels he always discovered who were the right people to know.

"He is a marvel," said the duchess to Christiane, speaking of him. "He knows everything, he does everything. I owe my figure to him."

"Your figure?"

"Yes, I was beginning to grow fat, and he saved me with his regimen and his liquors."

He knew, too, how to make the science of medicine itself interesting, speaking of it with an ease, gaiety, and faint scepticism that served to convince his audience of his superiority.

"It is very simple," he would say; "I do not believe in remedies. Or, rather, I hardly believe in them. The old doctor started from the principle that there is a remedy for everything. God, it was believed, in His

divine benevolence, had created drugs for all ills, only leaving to man, perhaps out of sheer malice, the trouble of discovering these drugs. Now men have discovered an incalculable number of them without ever knowing precisely for what ill each is suited. As a matter of fact, there are no remedies — only diseases. When a disease declares its presence, one school says you must interrupt its course, the other that you must accelerate it, by some method or other. Each school prescribes its own procedure. And you may see the most contradictory methods and opposite treatments used in the self-same case; ice by one doctor and extreme heat by another, starvation by this expert and forcible feeding by that. I do not mention the innumerable poisonous mineral or vegetable products procured for us by the art of chemistry. They all have their effects, I admit, but no one knows what those effects are. Sometimes they succeed and sometimes they kill."

With spirit and wit he pointed out the impossibility of certainty and the absence of any scientific basis, which were bound to persist until organic and biological chemistry were made the foundations of a new school of medical thought. He told anecdotes of the monstrous errors of the greatest doctors, proving the madness and falsity of their pretended science.

"Make the body work," he would say, "make the skin, the muscles, and all the organs work, especially the stomach, which is the foster-father of the whole apparatus, its regulator and storehouse combined."

He was in the habit of declaring that he could, at will, merely by dieting, induce gaiety or melancholy in his patients, and make them capable of physical or intellectual labour, according to the type of nourishment he prescribed for them. He could even act on the faculties of the brain, on the memory, the imagination, and all the manifestations of intelligence.

"As for me," he would conclude jestingly, "my treatment is massage and curaçao."

He was an enthusiast for massage, and spoke of the Dutchman Hamstrang as of a god, saying that he worked miracles. Then he would show his delicate white hands, and say:

"With those, one can bring the dead to life again."

And the duchess would add:

"Yes, he is indeed a perfect masseur."

He was also in the habit of prescribing alcohol in small quantities, to act as a spur to the digestion at certain periods; and he made cunningly composed mixtures for the duchess to drink at fixed times, before or after meals.

Every day he was seen to arrive at the *Café du Casino*, at about half past nine, and ask for his bottles. They were brought to him, fastened with little silver padlocks of which he possessed the key. He would pour out a little of one and a little of another, very slowly, into a pretty blue glass respectfully held by an immaculate footman.

Then the doctor would command:

"There! Take that to the duchess, to be drunk in her bath before she dresses, when she leaves the water."

And when some inquisitive person asked: "What have you put in?" he would reply:

"Nothing but anisette, the best curaçao, and first-rate bitters."

In a few days the handsome doctor became a target for every patient's attentions, and every sort of trick was brought into play in order to squeeze a few words of advice out of him.

When he passed along the park paths, during the hour of the daily walk, there was a continuous cry of "Doctor!" from all the chairs occupied by the young beauties, who were having a brief rest between two glasses of water from the *Christiane* spring. And when he

stopped, a smile on his lips, he was led away for a few moments for a stroll along the path by the river.

At first they kept to trivial subjects; then, discreetly, adroitly, and coquettishly, they led up to the health problem but with an air of indifference, as though they were speaking of a mere newspaper topic.

For this doctor was not at the service of the general public. He was not paid, and could not be called in for a consultation; he belonged to the duchess, and to the duchess alone. This state of affairs positively increased the general effort to get him, inflaming everyone's desire. And as it was whispered that the duchess was jealous, extremely jealous, there was a frantic struggle on the part of all these ladies to obtain the advice of the handsome Italian doctor.

He gave it without waiting to be very violently importuned.

Then, among the women whom he had favoured with his counsel, there began the game of intimate confidences to prove his solicitude.

“Oh, my dear, the questions he asked! . . .”

“Were they very indiscreet?”

“Indiscreet! They were perfectly awful. I positively did not know how to answer. The things he wanted to know! . . .”

“It was the same with me. He asked my any number of questions about my husband! . . .”

“Me too . . . and with such . . . such personal details! Most embarrassing. But of course one quite understands how necessary it is.”

“Oh, absolutely! One's health depends on these little details. I promised to be massaged in Paris this winter. It is most necessary, in order to complete the treatment here.”

“By the way, dear, what are you doing about it? One can't pay the man, can one?”

"Why, I was meaning to give him a tie-pin! He must like them; he has two or three very nice ones already.
...

"Oh, how awkward! The same idea had occurred to me. I'll give him a ring, then."

And everyone plotted surprises for his delight, ingenious presents to soften his heart, and little acts of kindness to seduce him.

He had become the talk of the town, the great subject of conversation, the only object of public attention, when the news was spread that Comte Gontran de Ravanel was wooing Charlotte Oriol and meant to marry her. This was news that staggered Enval.

Ever since the evening when he had opened the inauguration ball with her at the Casino, Gontran had danced attendance on her. In public he plied her with all the little attentions customary from men who wish to please and make no secret of their hopes, and at the same time their ordinary intercourse took on a touch of gay and natural gallantry that was bound to waken romance.

They saw one another almost every day, for the girls had become exceedingly friendly with Christiane, in which friendship there doubtless entered more than a hint of flattered vanity. All at once Gontran began to be unceasingly at his sister's side, and set to work to organise parties in the morning and games in the evening, whereat Christiane and Paul were very much surprised. Then it was noticed that he was devoting himself to Charlotte; he teased her gaily, complimented her without appearing to be doing so, and showed her all the innumerable little attentions that tie the bonds of love between two people. The girl, already accustomed to the free and familiar manners of this young sprig of Parisian society, noticed nothing at first, and, yielding to her confiding and trustful nature, laughed and played with him as she would have done with a brother.

One night she was returning home with her elder sister after spending the evening at the hotel, where Gontran had several times tried to kiss her as a forfeit she owed in a game of *pigeon vole* when Louise, who had seemed anxious and nervous for some time, suddenly remarked:

"You will do well to keep an eye on your behaviour. Monsieur Gontran's manners towards you are not at all proper."

"Not proper? What has he said?"

"You know quite well; don't play the innocent little fool. If you go on in this way, it won't be long before you let yourself be compromised. And if you won't keep an eye on your own conduct, it is my business to attend to it."

"But . . . I assure you . . . I don't know . . ." stammered Charlotte, confused and ashamed; "I haven't noticed anything . . ."

"Listen," continued her sister severely, "this must not go on. If he wants to marry you, it is for Father to think it over and give his answer; but if he is only amusing himself, it must stop at once."

Then Charlotte suddenly lost her temper, without knowing why or wherefore. She was furious that her sister was interfering to direct and reprimand her, and in a trembling voice, with tears in her eyes, declared that she had no business to meddle in what did not concern her. She stammered with exasperation, warned by a vague but certain instinct of the jealousy aroused in Louise's embittered heart.

They parted without kissing, and Charlotte cried in bed, thinking about things she had never foreseen or guessed.

Little by little her tears stopped and she began to reflect.

It was certainly true that Gontran's manner had changed. She had felt it already without understanding

it. Now she understood it. On every occasion he kept saying pretty, pleasant things to her. Once he had kissed her hand. What did he want? He liked her, but how much? Was it possible, by any chance, that he might marry her? And at once she seemed to hear a voice, somewhere far out in the night where her dreams were hovering, a voice that cried: "Comtesse de Ravel-nel!"

Her emotion was so great that she sat up in bed; then, with her bare feet, she felt for her slippers under the chair where she had thrown her clothes, and went to open the window, without thinking what she was doing, to give her dreams room to spread their wings.

She heard them talking in the room below; Colosse's voice suddenly burst out: "Let be, let be. There'll be time to see later on. Father will see to that. There's no harm done yet. Father will get it arranged."

On the house opposite, she could see the white square of the window lit up below her. "Who can be there?" she wondered. "What are they talking about?" A shadow passed across the illuminated wall. It was her sister's! So she had not gone to bed. Why not? But the light went out, and Charlotte continued to turn over the new ideas in her mind.

She could not sleep, now. Did he love her? Oh, no! Not yet! But he might love her, for he liked her! And if he came to love her passionately, as people in society love, he would be sure to marry her.

Born in a vinedresser's house, she had, in spite of her education in the Clermont convent, retained a peasant modesty and humility of disposition. She had thought it possible that she might have a solicitor for a husband, or a barrister, or a doctor; but the desire to become a really fashionable lady, with a title in front of her name, had never entered her head. Only when finishing a love story had she dreamed a little, caressed by an enticing

vision that had promptly slipped out of her mind like any dream phantom. And now this unforeseen, impossible thing, suddenly evoked by a few words from her sister, seemed drawing near her, like the sail of a boat thrust onward by the wind.

With each breath she took, her lips murmured: "Comtesse de Ravenel." And on the dark inner surface of her closed eyelids brilliant visions appeared; she saw beautiful lighted drawing-rooms, fair ladies smiling at her, fine carriages waiting at the steps of a great country mansion, and tall servants in livery bowing as she passed by.

She was hot, and her heart was beating furiously. She got up a second time to drink a glass of water, and remained standing for a few minutes, bare-footed, on the cold floor of her room.

At length, a little calmer, she managed to go to sleep. But she woke at daybreak, so powerfully was she stirred by her mental excitement.

She was ashamed of her little room and its white walls distempered by the local glazier, of the cheap muslin curtains, and of the two cane chairs that never left their positions on each side of her chest of drawers.

She felt herself to be a peasant, here amid the coarse furniture that spoke to her of her origin; she felt humble, unworthy of the handsome, laughing youth whose fair, merry face floated before her eyes, vanishing only to reappear, gradually getting a hold upon her mind and already finding a dwelling-place in her heart.

She jumped out of bed and went to get her looking-glass, a little hand-mirror no bigger than the bottom of a plate; then she returned to bed with the mirror in her hands, and stared at her face, framed in her disordered hair, against the white background of the pillow.

Now and again she laid down the little sheet of glass that showed her her image, and reflected how difficult

the marriage would be, so wide was the gulf between them. Then an agony of regret would clutch at her throat, but she would smile into the mirror again and, thinking herself pretty, see the difficulties vanish.

When she went down for breakfast, her sister looked annoyed.

"What have you arranged to do to-day?" she asked.

"Aren't we driving to Royat with Madame Andermatt?" replied Charlotte, without any hesitation.

"You will go by yourself, then," replied Louise, "but you would do better, after what I was saying to you last night . . . !"

"I was not asking you for advice . . . mind your own business," interrupted the younger sister, and they did not speak to one another for the rest of the meal.

Old Oriol and Jacques came in and sat down at the table. Almost at once the old man asked:

"And what are you doing to-day, children?"

"I'm going to Royat with Madame Andermatt," replied Charlotte, without giving her sister time to speak.

The two men looked at her with an air of satisfaction.

"Good, good," murmured her father, with the engaging smile he always wore when pulling off a good stroke of business.

She was more surprised at their secret pleasure, given away by their manner, than at Louise's obvious anger. "Can they have been talking this over together?" she wondered, a little anxiously.

As soon as the meal was over, she went up to her room, put on her hat, took her sunshade, threw a light coat over her arm, and went off to the hotel, for they were to start at half past one.

Christiane was surprised that Louise was not coming, and Charlotte felt herself blushing as she replied:

"She is rather tired; I think she has a headache."

They got into the landau, the big six-seated landau

which they always used. The marquis and his daughter occupied the back seat, and the younger Oriol girl accordingly found herself sitting between the two young men, with her back to the horses.

They passed Tournoël and ran round the foot of the mountains along a beautiful road that wound in and out under nut-trees and horse-chestnuts. Several times Charlotte noticed that Gontran was squeezing against her, but too cautiously for her to take offence at it. He was sitting on her right, and his mouth, when he spoke, was just by her cheek, and she dared not turn to reply, for fear of the breath from his lips, that she could already feel upon her own, and for fear, too, of his eyes, whose gaze would have embarrassed her.

His talk was all gallant nonsense, trifles of light-hearted fooling, and charming and amusing compliments.

Christiane hardly spoke at all; her condition was a burden to her and made her feel ill. Paul seemed melancholy and preoccupied. Only the marquis talked freely and happily, with the cheerful graciousness of a selfish old nobleman.

They went down to the Royat park to listen to the band and Gontran took Charlotte's arm and led the way with her. The crowd of patients sitting round the kiosk, where the conductor beat time to the brass and the violins, watched the people walk past. The women displayed their dresses, thrusting their feet out till they touched the rail of the chair in front of them; their cool summer hats added to their charm.

Charlotte and Gontran wandered off among the chairs, searching for odd figures to feed their sense of humour.

He was constantly hearing voices behind him saying: "Look! There's a pretty woman!" He was flattered, and wondered if she were being taken for his sister, his wife, or his mistress.

Christiane, sitting between her father and Paul, saw

them go past several times, and, thinking that they looked "rather young," called to them to calm them down a little. But they would not listen, and continued to roam amid the crowd, enjoying themselves with complete abandon.

"He will end by compromising her," she whispered to Paul Brétigny. "We must speak to him this evening when we get back."

"I had already thought of doing so," replied Paul; "you are quite right."

They dined in a restaurant at Clermont-Ferrand, those at Royat being no good, according to the marquis, who was an epicure. Night had fallen when they returned.

Charlotte had become serious, for Gontran had violently squeezed her hand as he gave her her glove when they rose from the table. Her maidenly conscience was suddenly disturbed. This was an avowal, a first step, an impropriety! What should she have done? Spoken to him? But what would she have said? It would have been ridiculous to be angry! So much tact was necessary on these occasions! But by doing nothing and saying nothing, she appeared to be accepting his advances, becoming his accomplice and answering "yes" to the pressure of his hand.

She weighed the situation, accusing herself of having been too gay and familiar at Royat, now thinking that her sister had been right, that she was indeed compromised, ruined! The carriage rolled on, Paul and Gontran were smoking in silence, the marquis was asleep, Christiane was gazing at the stars, and Charlotte had great difficulty in holding back her tears, for she had drunk three glasses of champagne.

"You will take her home; it is so dark," said Christiane to her father, when they were back at Enval.

The marquis gave her his arm and they departed together.

Paul grasped Gontran's shoulder and murmured into his ear:

"Come and have five minutes' conversation with your sister and me."

They went up to the little sitting-room which communicated with the rooms of Andermatt and his wife.

"Listen," said Christiane, as soon as they were seated, "Monsieur Paul and I are going to talk to you about your morals."

"My morals! . . . But what about? I'm as good as gold, thanks to the lack of an opportunity for anything else."

"Be serious, can't you? You are doing a very silly and dangerous thing without thinking about it. You are compromising that girl."

He seemed very much surprised.

"Whom do you mean? . . . Charlotte?"

"Yes, Charlotte!"

"I'm compromising Charlotte?"

"Yes. Everyone is talking about it here, and this afternoon, in the park at Royat, your behaviour was very . . . very . . . free. Wasn't it, Brétigny?"

"Yes," replied Paul, "I am entirely of your opinion."

Gontran turned his chair, straddled across it as though it were a horse, took a fresh cigar, lit it, and burst out laughing.

"Oh! So I'm compromising Charlotte Oriol?"

He waited for a few moments to see the effect of his answer, and then added:

"Well, who has told you that I don't want to marry her?"

Christiane started with amazement.

"Marry her? . . . You? . . . Why, you must be mad!"

"Why?"

"That . . . that little . . . peasant . . ."

"Tut tut . . . that's all prejudice . . . did you learn that sort of thing from your husband?"

As she would not reply to this direct attack, he continued, supplying both questions and answers himself:

“Is she pretty? — Yes! — Is she well brought up? — Yes! — And more innocent, and sweeter, and simpler, and franker than society girls. She is as well educated as any of them, for she speaks two foreign languages, English and Auvergne. She will be as rich as any heiress of the old Faubourg Saint-Germain, which ought to be renamed the Faubourg Saint-Stonybroke; and, if she’s a peasant’s daughter, she’s all the healthier for it, and will give me the finer children. . . . There! . . .”

As he still appeared to be laughing and jesting, Christiane ventured to ask:

“Are you speaking seriously?”

“Of course I am! The girl’s charming. She has a good heart and a pretty face, a merry disposition and plenty of humour, pink cheeks, bright eyes, white teeth, red lips, and long, shining, thick, smooth hair; and her father the vinedresser will be as rich as Crœsus, thanks to your husband, my dear sister. What more do you want? A peasant’s daughter! Well, isn’t a peasant’s daughter worth all the daughters of worm-eaten finance who pay so dear a price for doubtful dukes, and all the daughters of the titled harlotry bequeathed to us by the Empire, and all the daughters with two fathers whom one meets in society drawing-rooms? If I were to marry that girl, it would be the first wise and sensible action of my life! . . .”

Christiane reflected; then suddenly, convinced, conquered, and delighted, she exclaimed:

“Why, all that you have been saying is true! It’s perfectly true, perfectly right! . . . So you are going to marry her, Gontran dear? . . .”

It was his turn to calm her now.

“Not so fast . . . not so fast . . . it’s time to think; I only say: ‘If I were to marry her, it would be the first

wise and sensible action of my life.' That does not yet mean that I'm going to marry her; but I'm thinking about it, I'm studying her, paying court to her to a certain extent, just to see if she entirely pleases me. I can answer neither yes nor no, but it is nearer yes than no."

Christiane turned to Paul:

"And what do you think about it, Monsieur Brétigny?"

She addressed him alternately as Monsieur Brétigny and plain Brétigny.

As for him, he was always won over by anything in which he fancied he saw symptoms of greatness, by misalliances that seemed to him generous, and by all the clap-trap of sentiment in which the human heart is hidden.

"I think he is right this time," he replied. "If he likes her, he had better marry her; he could not find a better. . . ."

But the marquis and Andermatt returned, and they had to change the subject. The two young men went off to the Casino, to see whether the gambling-room was still open.

From that day onward, Christiane and Paul seemed to favour Gontran's wooing of Charlotte.

The girl was more frequently invited; she was kept to dinner, and was treated as though she were already one of the family.

She saw it all plainly, understood it, and lost her head over it. Her mind went wandering in the clouds, building fantastic castles in Spain. Gontran had not actually said anything to her, but his manner, all his words, the tone he took with her, his air of more serious gallantry, and the caress in his eyes seemed every day to be saying: "I have chosen you; you shall be my wife."

And the tone of gentle friendship, of discreet surrender, of girlish reserve which she now used towards him seemed to reply: "I know, and I shall say 'yes' when you ask for my hand."

The girl's family was whispering. Louise never spoke to her except to vex her with wounding allusions and bitter, biting words. Old Oriol and Jacques seemed pleased.

But she had not yet asked herself whether she loved the handsome suitor whose wife she would doubtless become. She liked him, she was always thinking of him, she found him good-looking, witty, and elegant, and, above all, she dreamed of what she would do when he married her.

Enval had forgotten the rancorous rivalry of the doctors and the owners of the springs, its theories on the Duchess de Ramas' feelings towards her doctor, and all the titbits of scandal that flow like the water from all spas. It was entirely occupied with the extraordinary news that Comte Gontran de Ravenel was going to marry the younger Oriol girl.

Then Gontran judged that the time was ripe; he took Andermatt's arm one morning, as they were leaving the dining-room, and said:

"Strike while the iron is hot. This is the exact situation. The girl is expecting my proposal, although I have not actually made any advances, but she will not repulse me, you may be sure of that. It's the father who must be sounded in such a way that we can pull off your business and mine simultaneously."

"You can make your mind easy," replied Andermatt. "I'll deal with it. I'll see him this very day, without compromising you or mentioning your name; and when the situation is perfectly clear, I will speak."

"That's exactly right," said Gontran, and, after a brief pause, continued: "This may be my last day as a free man. I'm going over to Royat, where I saw some friends of mine the other day. I'll be back during the night and I'll come and knock at your door to know the news."

He had his horse saddled and went off over the hills, sniffing the pure, light air, and galloping now and then to feel the swift caress of the wind brush against his cool cheeks and tickle his moustache.

The evening at Royat was gay. He met his friends, who had some women with them; they took a long time over supper, and he returned very late. Everyone was in bed at the Mont-Oriol Hotel when Gontran knocked on Andermatt's door.

At first there was no reply, but as his blows became more violent, a hoarse, sleepy voice grumbled from within:

“Who’s there?”

“It’s I, Gontran.”

“Wait, I’m coming.”

Andermatt appeared in his night-shirt, with a puffy face and bristling chin, his head wrapped in a scarf. Then he go back into bed and sat up — with his hands resting on the sheet.

“Well, it’s no go. This is the situation: I sounded that old fox Oriol, without mentioning you, saying that one of my friends — perhaps I gave him to understand that it was Paul Brétigny — might suit one of his daughters, and I asked him what portion he would be giving them. He replied by asking me what the young man’s fortune was; and I told him three hundred thousand francs with expectations.”

“But I’ve nothing,” murmured Gontran.

“I’ll lend it you, my dear boy. If we pull this off together, your land will give me enough to repay me.”

Gontran giggled: “Excellent! I shall get the girl and you’ll have the money.”

But Andermatt lost his temper:

“If I’m taking all this trouble about you for you to insult me, it’s all over; we’ll break it off”

Gontran was full of excuses:

Don't be angry, my dear; forgive me. I know you're a perfectly honest man, of irreproachable loyalty in business. I would not ask you for a tip if I were your coachman, but I'd trust my fortune to you if I were a millionaire."

"We'll return to that later," replied William, appeased. "But let us first finish the important question. The old man was not taken in by my trick, and replied: 'It depends on which you mean. If it is Louise, the elder, this is her dowry.' And he described all the land surrounding the pump-room, the part that joins the baths to the Casino and that between the Casino and the hotel; in fact, all the land that is indispensable to us, and of inestimable value to me. To the younger, however, he was giving the other side of the hill, which will also be of great value later on, no doubt, but which is worth nothing to me. I tried by every possible means to make him modify the division and exchange the two shares. But I was up against a mulish obstinacy. He will not change, that's certain. Now what do you think about it?"

"What do you think about it yourself?" replied Gontran, in great distress and perplexity. "Do you think he was thinking of me when he assigned the shares?"

"No, I don't suppose so. The peasant said to himself: 'If he likes the younger, I might as well keep the swag.' He hopes to give you his daughter and retain his best land. . . . And then, perhaps he wants to give the elder the advantage. . . . He prefers her . . . who knows? . . . she is more like himself . . . she is more cunning, cleverer . . . more practical. . . . I think the girl has a will of her own. . . . If I were in your place, I should change over. . . ."

But Gontran was quite overcome.

"Damn!" he murmured. "Damn! And Charlotte's land . . . you have no use for it?"

"I!" exclaimed Andermatt. "No . . . a thousand times no! I must have the part that joins up my baths, my hotel, and my Casino. It's very simple. I would give nothing for the rest, which could only be sold later, in small plots, to private owners."

"Damn! . . . Damn!" repeated Gontran. "This is a nuisance. . . . So your advice is. . . ."

"I give you no advice. But I think you would do well to think it over before deciding between the two sisters."

"Yes . . . yes . . . that's quite fair. . . . I'll think it over . . . but I'll go to sleep first . . . the night brings counsel. . . ."

He rose, but Andermatt restrained him.

"One moment, my dear, but I should just like one word on another matter. I may appear not to understand, but I do fully understand the allusions with which you are always gibing at me, and I want no more of them.

"You reproach me for being a Jew; that is, for making money, for being a miser, for speculating to make money out of financial adventures. Well, my lad, I spend my life lending you the money I make by the sweat of my brow, that is to say, giving it to you. But let that pass! But there is one point I will not admit. I am no miser; if you want a proof, I'm giving your sister presents that cost twenty thousand francs, spending ten thousand on a Théodore Rousseau your father wanted, and giving you, when you came here, the horse on which you went to Royat this afternoon.

"How am I a miser, then? Because I don't allow myself to be robbed. All my race are like that, and we're quite right, sir. I want to tell you that once and for all. We are called misers because we know the exact value of things. To you a piano is a piano, a chair is a chair, a pair of trousers a pair of trousers. So they are to us,

but at the same time they represent a value, an appreciable and precise commercial value which a practical man must be able to estimate at a glance, not for the sake of making money, but in order to discourage fraud.

"What would you say if a tobacconist charged you four sous for a ten-centime stamp or a box of matches? You would go and fetch a policeman, just for the sake of a sou, you'd be so full of righteous indignation! That is because you happen to know the value of those two commodities. Well, I know the value of every object that can be bought and sold, and when I am asked twenty francs for an umbrella worth fifteen, I experience the same indignation that you would if you were asked four sous for a postage stamp. Now do you understand? I protest against the commercial dishonesty of your nation, which despises us. I give a tip relative to the service rendered, not the fantastic tip which you throw down without knowing why, and which runs from five sous to a hundred, according to your whim. Now do you understand?"

Gontran had risen, smiling with the delicate irony that suited his lips so well.

"Yes, my dear, I understand, and you are quite right, all the more right in that my grandfather, the old Marquis de Ravenel, left practically nothing to my poor father, as a result of his bad habit of never picking up his change after a purchase. He thought it unworthy of a nobleman, and always gave the round sum and the whole coin."

And Gontran departed with an air of complete satisfaction.

III

THEY were about to sit down to dinner next day in the private dining-room belonging to the Andermatt and Ravenel families, when Gontran opened the door and announced:

“Mesdemoiselles Oriol.”

They came in, embarrassed, pushed forward by the laughing Gontran.

“I kidnapped them both, out in the street,” he explained. “There will be an awful scandal about it. I’ve brought them here by force, because I want to explain myself to Mademoiselle Louise, and I could not do so in the middle of the village.”

He took their hats and sunshades, which they were still wearing and holding, for they were returning from a walk, and made them sit down. Then he kissed his sister, shook hands with his father, his brother-in-law, and Paul, and, turning once more to Louise Oriol, said:

“And now, mademoiselle, will you have the kindness to tell me what you have had against me this long time?”

She fluttered like a bird taken in the net and carried off by the captor.

“Nothing, monsieur, nothing at all. What can have made you think such a thing?”

“Everything, mademoiselle, everything on earth. You never come here nowadays, you never come in the Noah’s Ark” (his nickname for the big landau). “You look dourly at me when I meet you and when I speak to you.”

“Oh, no, monsieur, I assure you it isn’t so.”

"Oh, yes, mademoiselle, I assure you it is. However that may be, I want it to stop and I am going to make a peace treaty with you, this very day. I'm an obstinate devil, you know. It will be no use your frowning on me: I'll surely find a way to tame you and make you decide to be as gracious to us as your sister, who is an angel of kindness."

Dinner was announced and they went into the dining-room. Gontran took Louise's arm.

He was assiduous in his attention to her and to her sister, dividing his pretty speeches between them with admirable tact, telling the younger:

"You're already our comrade: I'm going to neglect you for a few days. One takes less trouble over one's friends than over strangers you know."

He told the elder:

"I intend to win you over, mademoiselle, and, like a loyal enemy, I warn you of it. I shall go so far as to court you. Now you're blushing; that's a good sign. You'll see how charming I can be when I'm really trying. Isn't it so, Mademoiselle Charlotte?"

Whereat they both blushed, and Louise stammered gravely:

"You're quite mad."

"Nonsense," he answered; "when you go out into the world, you'll meet plenty of people who'll talk to you like this, after you're married. That's when you'll find yourself listening to pretty speeches."

Christiane and Paul Brétigny were pleased that he had brought Louise Oriol back again; the marquis smiled, amused by this childish playacting; Andermatt thought: "The lad's not doing so badly." And Gontran, irritated by the part he had to play, swayed by his desires towards Charlotte and by his interest towards Louise, smiled on the latter and muttered between his teeth: "Ah, your scoundrel of a father thinks he has got the better of

me; but I'm going to lead you a pretty dance, my dear, and you'll see whether I don't come best out of it after all."

And he compared them, looking from one to the other. The younger certainly pleased him more: she was more amusing, more alive, with her slightly tip-tilted nose, her dancing eyes, her narrow forehead, and her fine teeth that were a little too big and set in a mouth a little too wide.

Nevertheless, the other was as pretty, colder, not so gay. Intimacy with her would have nothing of charm or of a delicate audacity, but when "Madame la Comtesse de Ravenel" was announced in the ball-room, she would bear easily, perhaps more easily than would the younger girl, the honours of her name, with just a little of the familiarity bred of usage and a little intercourse with well-bred people. He was, none the less, very angry: he felt resentful towards both of them, towards father and brother too, and he promised himself to make them pay for his ill luck later, when he had the whip-hand.

When they returned to the drawing-room, he persuaded Louise to read the cards: she was very clever at foretelling the future. The marquis, Andermatt, and Charlotte listened attentively, fascinated in spite of themselves by the mystery of the unknown, by the possibility of the unlikely becoming likely, by that unquenchable belief in the marvellous which haunts all men and insinuates a doubt into the clearest intellects when they are confronted by the crudest inventions of charlatans.

Paul and Christiane were talking in the recess of an open window.

She had been unhappy for some time, feeling herself no longer loved with the same ardour; the rift in their love widened with each day, and both were to blame for it. She had sensed this unhappy state of affairs for the

first time on the evening of the fête, when she walked with Paul along the road. But even while she realised that his glance was less tender, his voice less caressing, and he less passionately in love than before, she could not guess the cause of this change.

It had existed for a long time, since the day when, coming to see him as she came every day, she had cried joyfully: "Do you know, I believe I am really *enceinte*!" He had felt in that instant the faintest shiver of physical revulsion.

Then, each time they met, she spoke to him of the pregnancy that made her heart beat wildly with joy; but this absorption in a thing that seemed to him annoying, displeasing, and awkward, dulled the ardour of his devotion to this adored idol.

Later still, seeing her changed, grown thin, hollow-cheeked and sallow-skinned, he felt that she ought to have spared him the sight of her thus and disappeared for a few months to reappear in due course prettier and more engaging than ever, enough of an artist to erase all memory of this unfortunate happening from his mind, or even artist enough to deepen the audacious charm of a mistress by adding to it yet another, the subtle and discreet charm of the young mother whose baby appears only in the background, wrapped in pink ribbons.

She had, moreover, a rare opportunity to display the tact he expected of her when she went to spend the summer at Mont-Oriol and left him in Paris, where he was spared the sight of her grown unattractive and distorted. He hoped fervently that she realised it!

But she had hardly arrived in the Auvergne when she had begun to summon him in a flood of despairing letters, so numerous and urgent that he had come, unable, for pity, to refuse. And now, she overwhelmed him with her ungraceful dolorous affection; he felt an almost irresistible impulse to leave her, to get out of her sight

and out of hearing of her song of love, so irritating and so out of place as it was. He would have liked to tell her candidly what he was feeling and explain to her how tactless and stupid she was showing herself, but he could not do it, and he dared not go away, and he could no longer refrain from manifesting his impatience by bitter and wounding words.

They hurt her the more that, ill, bearing every day now a heavier burden, suffering all the miseries of a pregnant woman, she needed more than ever to be comforted, idolised, and wrapped about with love. She loved him with that utter surrender of body and soul, of the whole self, that can make of love an unreserved and boundless sacrifice. She no longer thought of herself as his mistress, but as his wife, his companion, his devoted and faithful lover, his suppliant slave, his thing. For her their relationship was no longer a passionate adventure, a desire to attract and to be always pleasing, a charming game of loving and being loved, since she belonged to him utterly, since they were linked by this bond at once so dear and so powerful: the child that would soon be born.

As soon as they were alone in the window, she took up again the burden of her loving complaint.

“Paul, dear Paul, tell me, do you still love me as much as ever?”

“Of course I do. Look here, you ask me this every day; it ends by becoming monotonous.”

“Forgive me. It is because I can’t believe it any longer, and I need to be reassured, I want to hear you say those wonderful words again and again; and since you no longer say them as often as you did, I must demand them, implore them, beg for them.”

“Very well, then, I love you. But, for heaven’s sake, let’s talk of something else.”

“Oh, how hard you are!”

"No, I am not hard. Only . . . only, you don't understand . . . you don't understand that . . ."

"Oh, yes, I understand quite well that you don't love me any more. If you knew how I suffer! . . ."

"Come, Christiane, I do beg you, don't drive me mad. If you only knew how you jar on me when you talk like this!"

"Oh, if you loved me, you would not say such things."

"But, damn it, if I had ceased to love you I should not have come here."

"Listen! You belong to me now. You are mine, and I am yours. We are held together by the unbreakable bond of this new life; but promise me that if ever there comes a day when you cease to love me, you will tell me."

"Yes, I promise you that."

"You swear it."

"I swear it."

"But even then we shall still remain friends, shan't we?"

"Of course, we shall always be friends."

"The day when you no longer love me as my lover, you will come to me and say: 'My little Christiane, I love you very much, but it's no longer the same thing. Let's be friends now, just friends.'"

"Very well, I promise."

"You swear it."

"I swear it."

"All the same, I shall be very sad. How you adored me a year ago!"

A voice shouted behind them:

"The Duchess de Ramas-Aldavarra."

She was paying a friendly call, for every evening Christiane received the most distinguished people staying in the place, as princes receive at court.

Doctor Mazelli, smiling and obsequious, followed the

beautiful Spaniard. The two women shook hands, sat down side by side, and began to talk.

Andermatt called Paul:

"Come over here, my dear boy. Mademoiselle Oriol is perfectly splendid with the cards, she has told me the most astonishing things."

He took Paul's arm and added:

"What a queer fellow you are! In Paris, we never see you, not once a month, in spite of my wife's repeated invitations. Here, it took fifteen letters to get you to come. And since you came, anyone would say you were losing a million a day, you look so miserable. Tell me, is there anything on your mind? Perhaps I could help you? You must tell me about it."

"I've nothing on my mind, my dear. If I don't come to see you oftener in Paris . . . it simply is that in Paris, don't you know . . ."

"Quite. . . . I understand. But we must really get something up in this place. I am preparing two or three shows for you which will be very successful, I think."

"Madame Barre and Professor Cloche," was announced.

He came in with his daughter, a young widow, red-haired and self-assured. Then, almost immediately after, the same servant cried:

"Professor Mas-Roussel."

His wife accompanied him, a pale middle-aged woman with her hair swathed flat against her head.

Professor Rémusot had left the day before, after buying his chalet on exceptionally favourable terms, it was said.

The other two doctors would have liked to know what the terms were, but Andermatt only replied:

"Oh, we made certain little adjustments that were to everyone's advantage. If you wish to follow his ex-

ample, it could easily be arranged, quite easily. . . . When you have made up your minds, come and tell me about it, and then we can talk it over."

Doctor Latonne appeared in due course, then Doctor Honorat, without his wife, who never went out.

The drawing-room was filled now by the sound of voices and a murmur of talk. Gontran never left Louise Oriol, talking in her ear, and now and then throwing a laughing remark to some passer-by:

"This is an enemy of mine: I'm making a conquest of her."

Mazelli was sitting beside Professor Cloche's daughter. He had been following her round for some days: and she received his advances with a provocative self-assurance.

The duchess never took her eyes off him, seeming irritated and nervous. Suddenly she rose, crossed the drawing-room, and, interrupting her doctor's tête-à-tête with the red-haired charmer, said:

"Come, Mazelli, we'll go now. I don't feel very well."

As soon as they had gone, Christiane, who had rejoined Paul, remarked to him:

"Poor woman! She must be very unhappy."

He asked indifferently:

"Who?"

"The duchess. Don't you see how jealous she is?"

He made a brusque answer:

"If you're going to begin lamenting over all the woes of the universe now, you'll shed a lot of tears before you die."

She turned away from him, ready to cry in very truth, stabbed by what she felt to be his cruelty, and sitting down by Charlotte Oriol, who was left lonely and bewildered. Puzzled by Gontran's manner, she said: "There are days when one would like to be dead." The young girl did not understand her.

Andermatt, surrounded by the doctors, was relating

the extraordinary case of old Clovis, whose limbs were showing signs of life. He seemed so convinced that no one could doubt his good faith.

Since he had seen through the trick planned by the peasants and the paralytic, and realised that he had allowed himself to be duped and convinced last year by nothing more than his consuming desire to believe in the efficacy of the waters, and especially since he could not, without paying him, get rid of the old man's determined complaints, he had spread the fame of the cure far and wide, making the most successful use of it.

Mazelli had just come back, after taking his patient home, free now.

Gontran took him by the arm:

"Now, most excellent physician, I want your advice. Which of the little Oriol girls do you prefer?"

The gay doctor whispered in his ear:

"The young one to take to bed; the elder one for a wife."

Gontran laughed.

"Splendid, we're both of the same mind. I'm delighted to know it."

He went across to his sister, who was still talking to Charlotte.

"Do you know what? I've just decided that on Friday we'll go to the Puy de la Nugère. It's the finest crater in the whole range. Everybody's willing. It's all arranged."

Christiane murmured indifferently:

"I'll do anything you like."

But Professor Cloche, followed by his daughter, came to say good night, and Mazelli, offering himself as an escort, walked out behind the young widow.

In a few moments everyone had gone, for Christiane went to bed at eleven o'clock.

The marquis, Paul, and Gontran walked home with

the Oriol girls. Gontran and Louise went in front, and Brétigny, walking a few paces behind them, felt Charlotte's arm trembling a little in his.

They parted with cries of "On Friday, at eleven, breakfast in the hotel!"

On the way back, they met Andermatt, detained in a corner of the garden by Professor Mas-Roussel, who was saying to him:

"Well, if it's quite convenient, I'll talk over this little matter of the chalet with you to-morrow morning."

William joined the young men and returned to the hotel with them, standing on tiptoe to whisper to his brother-in-law:

"Congratulations, my dear, you were splendid."

For the past two years Gontran had been harassed by lack of money: his life was spoiled by it. After dissipating his mother's fortune, he continued to live — with a nonchalant indifference inherited from his father — in that younger set, rich, bored, and dissolute, whose names appear in the papers every morning, who belong to society, but are rarely seen in it, and give themselves up to the society of the women of the town and the pursuit of pretty shopgirls.

A dozen of them, all belonging to the same set, might be found any evening in the same café on the boulevard between midnight and three o'clock. The most elegant of young men, always in evening dress and white waist-coats, wearing sleeve-links worth twenty louis that they changed each month and bought from the most exclusive jewellers, they had no other care in life but to amuse themselves, to collect women, to talk of them, and to find money by every possible means.

As they knew nothing save yesterday's scandals, the gossip of boudoirs and stables, duels and tales of high play, the horizons of their minds were bounded by these walls.

They had had all the women on sale in the love market, grown tired of them, given them up to each other, lent them to each other, and discussed among themselves their amorous qualities as if they were discussing the points of a racehorse. They frequented, too, the restless titled set that gets itself talked about and whose women, almost all of them, openly indulge in liaisons under the indifferent, averted, shut, or even wide-open eyes of their husbands; and they judged of these women as they judged of the others, measuring them by the same standards even while they recognised a certain slight difference due to birth and social rank.

A long course of wangling the money they needed for their manner of life, deceiving money-lenders, borrowing on all sides, dodging their creditors, of laughing in the faces of tailors who brought them, every six months, a bill three thousand francs bigger than the previous one, listening to pretty ladies boasting the shameless tricks beloved of their greedy female souls, of seeing cheating common to every class, of knowing and feeling themselves robbed by everyone, by servants, by tradespeople, by the managers of the expensive restaurants and others, of knowing how to turn their hands to certain crooked financial transactions or shady business deals in order to draw therefrom a few louis and doing it—all had blunted and worn down their moral sense, and the only point of honour left to them consisted in fighting a duel as soon as they believed themselves suspected of all the things of which they were either capable or guilty.

All, or almost all of them, were compelled to end a few years of this existence by a rich marriage, or a scandal, or suicide, or by a mysterious disappearance, as complete as death.

But they counted on the rich marriage. Some of them hoped that their families would find one for them, others searched vainly for themselves and had lists of heiresses

as one has lists of houses to sell. They made a special study of foreigners, North and South American women whom they dazzled by their arrogant charm, by their reputations as men of the world, by the fame of their successes and the elegance of their persons. And their backers also counted on the rich marriage.

But this pursuit of a suitably endowed young woman might last a long time. In any event, it entailed research, the labour of charming her, travail of mind and body, visits and a carefully prepared campaign of which Gontran, careless by nature, was for ever quite incapable.

For some time, suffering every day more acutely the annoyance of a shortage of money, he had been saying to himself: "I really must look round." But he did not look round, and he did not find anything.

He was reduced thereby to an ingenious angling for small loans, to all the dubious transactions of a person at the end of his resources, and finally to prolonged family visits, when Andermatt had suddenly suggested to him the idea of marrying one of the young Oriols.

Wisely, he made no immediate answer, although on first consideration the young girl seemed so much below him as to make the misalliance impossible. But a brief reflection had speedily modified his opinion, and he decided shortly to make love to her in the light-hearted fashion of a summer flirtation, which would not compromise him and would allow him to beat a retreat.

Knowing his brother-in-law as well as he did, he was sure that this proposition must have been long pondered, weighed, and carefully planned by him, and that, coming from him, it was worth a big sum difficult to obtain elsewhere.

It was no hardship to go a little further, to stoop and pick up a pretty girl, for he found the younger girl very charming and had often said that it would be very pleasant to meet her again later.

So he had chosen Charlotte Oriol and in a very short time had brought her to a suitable state of mind for making a formal declaration.

Then, her father giving to his other daughter the dowry that Andermatt coveted, Gontran had been compelled either to renounce the marriage or to turn his attentions to the elder.

He had fiercely resented the necessity, and at first had contemplated telling his brother-in-law to go to the devil and remaining a bachelor until another opportunity presented itself.

But at this very moment he was cleaned out so thoroughly that, to try his luck in the Casino, he had had to borrow twenty-five louis from Paul, on top of various other loans never repaid. Besides, he would have to look for another woman, find her, make a conquest of her. He might have to combat a hostile family, while without going away, by just devoting a few days to the task and making a few pretty speeches, he could capture the elder Oriol girl as he had been able to win the younger. He would thus ensure for himself, in the person of his brother-in-law, a banker whom he could always hold responsible, whom he could reproach for the rest of his days, and whose purse would be always open to him.

As for his wife, he would take her to Paris, and there present her as the daughter of Andermatt's partner. She bore, moreover, the name of the spa, where he would never take her again, never, never, in view of the axiom that a river doesn't flow back to its source. She was good-looking and graceful, distinguished enough to become completely so, intelligent enough to understand the world, to hold her place there, to make a success of life there, even to do him honour. People would say: "The young devil has married a beautiful girl, and he appears to make a pretty fool of her," and he would indeed make a pretty fool of her, for he counted on taking up his

bachelor life after his marriage, with his pockets full of money.

So he had turned to Louise Oriol and, profiting unawares by the jealousy roused in the secret places of the young girl's heart, had wakened in her a coquette who had slept until now, and a vague desire to rob her sister of this fine lover who was called "Count."

She had not said as much to herself, she had neither reflected nor planned, surprised by her meeting with them, and their insistence on her company. But when she saw him eager and attentive, she had felt, by his manner, by his glances and his whole attitude, that he was not in love with Charlotte, and, making no attempt to see farther into it than this, she went to bed that night feeling happy, joyous, almost victorious.

They hesitated a long time on the following Friday before setting out for the Puy de la Nigère. An overcast sky and the heavy atmosphere presaged rain. But Gontran was so insistent that he over-persuaded the wavering.

Breakfast had been a gloomy meal. Christiane and Paul had quarrelled the day before with no apparent reason. Andermatt was afraid that Gontran's marriage would not come off, because old Oriol had spoken of it in an ambiguous way that very morning. Gontran, warned, was furious and determined to succeed. Charlotte, who foresaw her sister's triumph, without guessing at all these strategic moves, was strongly inclined to stay in the village. She was with difficulty persuaded to come.

So the Noah's Ark carried its usual passengers, the whole company of them, towards the high plateau that looks down on Volvic.

Louise Oriol, abruptly talkative, did the honours of the road. She explained that Volvic stone, which is nothing but the lava from the surrounding hills, has been used to build all the churches and houses in the country-side, giving to the towers of the Auvergne the sombre

blackened aspect that they wear. She showed them the yards where the stone was trimmed, pointed out the lava bed, which had become a quarry where the raw lava was dug out, and made them admire the immense black Virgin set on a hill-top and hovering over Volvic, protectress of the city.

Then they ascended towards the upper plateau, dotted with extinct volcanoes. The horses covered the long difficult road at a walk. Beautiful green woods bordered the road. Silence fell on the party.

Christiane was thinking of Tazenat. It was the same carriage! They were the same people, but their hearts were no longer the same. Everything looked the same . . . and yet? . . . yet? What had happened? Almost nothing. She was a little more in love . . . he a little less . . . almost nothing! . . . the difference between new-born and dying desire . . . almost nothing! . . . the unseen gulf that boredom opens between lovers . . . oh, almost nothing, almost nothing! . . . and eyes whose glance has changed because the same eyes look at the same face and see it other than they did! . . . What is a glance? . . . Almost nothing!

The coachman stopped and said:

“It’s here, on the right, along this path, in the wood. You’ve only to keep to the path, and you’ll reach it.”

Everyone got down, except the marquis, who found the weather too warm. Louise and Gontran went on ahead and Charlotte stayed behind, with Paul and Christiane, who could hardly walk. The road seemed long to her, through the wood; then they arrived at a crest covered with tall grasses that led them, still climbing, to the edge of the dead crater.

Louise and Gontran had paused on the summit; tall and slender, they seemed to be standing in the clouds.

The others joined them, and Paul Brétigny’s ardent spirit was caught up in a sudden ecstasy of joy.

Round them, behind them, to right and left, they were surrounded by strange headless cones, some upthrust to the sky, and others thrown down and shattered, but all of them retaining the fantastic aspect of dead volcanoes. Their graceless stumps of flat-topped mountains rose to south and west on a vast and desolate plateau, itself a thousand metres higher than the Limagne, and dominating it to east and north as far as the eye could see, to the hidden rim of the world, for ever veiled, for ever dimly blue.

On the right, the Puy de Dôme towered above all its broken seventy or eighty craters now slumbering. Farther off, the peaks of Gravenoir, Crovel, La Pedge, Sault, Noschamps, La Vache. Nearer, the Puy de Pariou, the Puy de Côme, the peaks of Jumes, Tressoux, Louchadière: a vast graveyard of volcanoes.

The young people looked at the scene before them in silent amazement. The first crater of the Nugère fell away below their feet, a deep grassy pit, at the bottom of which there were still three enormous blocks of brown lava, flung up by the mountain's last breath, to fall back between his dying jaws, and there stay, age after age, for ever and ever.

Gontran cried:

"I'm going to the bottom, I am! I want to see how these great beasts give up the ghost! Come on, young women, a little run down the slope!" And, seizing Louise by the arm, he dragged her away. Charlotte followed, running behind them. Then halted abruptly. She watched their eager flying progress, arm linked in arm; and, turning sharply round, climbed back to where Christiane and Paul were seated on the grass at the top of the descent. When she reached them, she fell on her knees and, hiding her face in the young woman's dress, burst into sobs.

Christiane had realised the whole thing: nowadays the

grief of others stabbed her as if she took the wounds in her own body. She threw her arms round the girl's neck and, with tears in her own eyes, murmured:

“Poor little thing, poor little thing!”

The child continued to weep, utterly beaten. Her head hidden, she tugged at the grass with an unconscious gesture of hands pressed against the ground.

Brétigny had risen to his feet to give her the chance of thinking he had seen nothing, but the sight of this girlish misery, this hurt innocent, filled him with a sudden indignation against Gontran. He — whom Christiane's terrible agony exasperated — was moved to the depths of his heart by this slip of a child suffering her first disillusionment.

He came back and, kneeling down himself to speak to her, said:

“Come, try and be quiet now, I implore you. They'll be coming back again; try and be quiet. They mustn't see you crying.”

She jumped to her feet, horrified by the thought that her sister might come back and find her with tears in her eyes. Her throat was still swelling with sobs; she restrained them, choking them down, and they fled back to her heart to add to its burden of pain. She stammered:

“Yes . . . yes . . . I've stopped . . . it's nothing. . . . I've stopped. . . . Tell me . . . you couldn't see I've been crying now . . . could you? . . . You couldn't tell?”

Christiane dried the girl's cheeks with her handkerchief, then passed it across her own. She said to Paul:

“Go and see what they are doing. They're out of sight. They've disappeared beneath the blocks of lava. I'll keep this child here and comfort her.”

Brétigny stood up, and spoke with a voice that shook: “I'll go down . . . and I'll bring them back, but

your brother shall answer to me . . . this very day . . . and he'll give me an explanation of conduct which is absolutely unjustifiable after what he said to us the other day."

He set off running towards the bottom of the crater.

Gontran, dragging Louise with him, had rushed her at top speed down the steep slope of the great pit, so as to hold her close and support her, shaking her breath out of her body, dazing and startling her. Carried away by her own impetus, she tried to stop, stammering:

"Oh, not so fast! . . . I shall fall! . . . You're mad! . . . I shall fall!"

They ran violently into the blocks of lava, and stood there, both completely out of breath. Then they walked right round, looking at the great cracks that formed a sort of cavern with two entrances, underneath the blocks of lava.

When the dying volcano had sent out this last spurt of froth, it could no longer fling it to the sky: it spewed it forth, stiffening, half cold, and the stuff had congealed on its dying lips.

"We must go under there," said Gontran.

He pushed the young girl in front of him. Then, as soon as they were in the grotto:

"Well, mademoiselle, this is the moment to make you a declaration."

She was thunderstruck.

"A declaration . . . to me!"

"Certainly, in four words: I find you charming."

"You should say that to my sister."

"Oh, you know quite well that I don't intend to propose to your sister."

"I don't understand."

"Come now, you're no true woman if you didn't realise that I made love to her to see what you would think of it . . . and have you any idea what you looked

likely . . . You looked perfectly furious. Oh, how pleased I was! Then I tried to show you, by every kind of attention, what I was feeling for you. . . .”

No one had ever spoken to her like this before. She felt confused and thrilled, her heart overflowing with joy and pride.

He went on:

“I know quite well that I’ve behaved badly to your little sister. So much the worse for me. It didn’t deceive her, though, not the least bit. You notice she’s stayed on the hill-side, that she didn’t want to follow us. . . . Oh, she understood, she understood!”

He had taken one of Louise Oriol’s hands, and he kissed her finger-tips, gently, gallantly, murmuring:

“How charming you are! How charming you are!”

Leaning against the wall of lava, she heard her heart beating with emotion, and found no words. The only thought that emerged in the clamour of her mind was a triumphant one: she had defeated her sister.

But a shadow fell across the entrance to the grotto. Paul Brétigny was looking at them. With an easy gesture, Gontran released the little hand that he was pressing against his lips, and said:

“So here you are! . . . Are you alone?”

“Yes. We were surprised to see you disappear underneath.”

“Well, we’ll come back, my dear. We were looking at this. It’s a queer place, isn’t it?”

Louise, blushing to her temples, went out first and began to climb the slope again, followed by the two young men, who were talking in low voices behind her.

Christiane and Charlotte watched them come, waiting for them hand in hand.

They walked back to the carriage, where the marquis waited for them; and the Noah’s Ark set out again for Enval.

All at once, the landau stopped in the middle of a little pine wood, and the coachman began swearing: the dead body of an ancient donkey barred the road.

They all wanted to see it, and they climbed out of the carriage. It was stretched out on the blackish dust, itself as sombre-hued, and so thin that the skin, stretched tight over the jutting bones, looked as though they would have burst through it if the beast had not given up the ghost. The whole skeleton was visible under the worn skin that covered its sides, and its head seemed immensely big, a poor head with eyes fast closed, lying quiet, on its bed of fine ground stone, so quiet, so utterly dead, that it seemed happy and surprised by this strange rest. Its long ears, relaxed now, lay stretched out as limp as rags. Two open sores on its knees told of frequent falls — some had happened this very day, before it dropped for the last time; and another sore on the flank marked the place where, year after year, its master had pricked it with an iron point fixed at the end of a stick to hasten its burdened progress.

The coachman took it by its hind legs and dragged it towards a ditch; the neck stretched out as if the beast would bray once more, make one last complaint. When it lay on the grass, the man muttered furiously:

“The swine, to leave it in the middle of the road!”

No one else had said a word; they got back into the carriage.

Christiane, saddened, profoundly moved, saw the whole wretched life of this animal lying dead and done for on the roadside: the little joyous colt, with its large head and large shining eyes, absurd and adorable young thing, with its shaggy coat and long ears, gambolling, still free, between its mother's legs; then the first cart, the first hill, the first blows! And then, the endless, dreadful dragging down interminable roads! Blows! Blows! Burdens that were far too heavy, burning suns, its food

a morsel of straw, a morsel of hay, a few branches, and the tantalising vision of green meadows beside the hard roads.

And, after that, age creeping on, the iron point replacing the supple switch — and the frightful martyrdom of a worn-out, panting, dying beast, day in and day out dragging its monstrous burdens, suffering in every limb, in every inch of its old body, as threadbare as a beggar's coat. And then death, kindly death, three steps from the grass-grown ditch to which it was dragged by a cursing passer-by to clear it out of the road.

For the first time, Christiane realised the misery endured by enslaved creatures; and she thought that death was sometimes sweet.

Suddenly they drove past a little cart dragged by a half-naked man, a woman in rags, and an emaciated dog, all at the last gasp of exhaustion.

They saw them sweating and panting. The dog, thin and covered with scabs, its tongue hanging out, was fastened between the wheels. In the cart was wood gathered from all sorts of places, stolen probably, roots, stumps, and broken branches, that seemed to be concealing other things; then, on top of these branches, rags, and, on the rags, a child, only a head emerging from grey tattered garments, a round little bullet, with two eyes, a nose, and a mouth!

It was a family, this spectacle, a human family. The ass had succumbed to its miseries, and the man, without feeling one spark of pity for the dead servant, without even pushing it into the ditch, had left it there in the middle of the road across the track of the next carriage that came that way. Then he had harnessed himself and his wife now between the vacant shafts, and they had gone on their way, dragging the cart as the beast had dragged it before. On their way! Where? To do what? Did they possess as much as a handful of sous?

This carriage . . . would they go on dragging it, unable to buy another animal? What would they live on? Where would they stop? Probably they would die as their colt had died.

Were they married, these wretched creatures? or only paired? And their child would lead the same life, that little shapeless lump of humanity, hidden under its sordid rags.

Christiane thought of all these things; strange ideas stirred in the depths of her bewildered mind. She caught a glimpse of the misery of the poor.

Gontran said suddenly:

"I don't know why, but I should very much like us all to dine together this evening, at the *Café Anglais*. I should like to look out over the boulevard."

And the marquis murmured:

"Bah! We're quite well off. The new hotel is infinitely better than the old one."

They were passing *Tournoël*. A memory made Christiane's heart beat wildly at the sight of a chestnut-tree. She looked at Paul, who had shut his eyes and did not see her humble appeal.

Shortly after, they came in sight of two men just ahead of the carriage, two vine-growers returning from work, carrying hoes on their shoulders and walking with the slow weary stride of working-men.

The Oriol girls blushed to the roots of their hair. It was their father and their brother, who worked among the vines as they had done before, spending their days sweating over the soil that had enriched them; bent double, rumps in the air, they worked over it from morning till night while the fine, skirted coats, carefully folded, were laid away in a chest, and the tall hats in a cupboard.

The two peasants gave them a friendly smile, and every hand in the carriage replied to their greeting.

As soon as they returned, Gontran got out of the ark and made for the Casino. Brétigny accompanied him and, stopping him after a few steps, said:

“Listen, my dear, you’re behaving badly, and I’ve promised your sister to speak to you about it.”

“Speak to me about what?”

“Of your conduct during the last few days.”

Gontran’s face had assumed its most insolent air.

“My conduct? Towards whom?”

“Towards the child you’re deserting so shabbily.”

“You feel like that about it?”

“Yes, I do . . . and I’m justified in doing so.

“You’re becoming remarkably scrupulous in the matter of desertions.”

“My dear fellow, this is not a question of a wench, but of a decent young girl.”

“I know that, as I haven’t been to bed with her. The difference is very plain.”

They were walking on again now, side by side. Gontran’s manner exasperated Paul and he added:

“If I were not your friend, I’d speak pretty plainly to you.”

And I’d not allow you to do it.”

“Look here, my dear, listen to me, I’m sorry for the child. She was crying bitterly.”

“Crying, was she? Well, I’m flattered.”

“Look here, it’s not a fit subject for jesting. What do you intend to do?”

“I? Nothing.”

“Look here, you’ve gone far enough with her to compromise her. Only the other day you were saying to your sister and me that you were thinking of marrying her . . .”

Gontran halted; he spoke in a mocking voice that held a hint of menace:

“My sister and you would do well not to interfere in

other people's love-affairs. I said to you that I found the girl very charming, and that if I ever got so far as marrying her — it would be a wise and reasonable thing to do. That's all. But it happens now that I prefer the elder. I have changed my mind. That might happen to anyone."

Then, looking Paul squarely in the face, he said:

"What do you do when you're tired of a woman? Do you deal tenderly with her?"

Surprised, Paul Brétigny tried to get at the underneath hidden meaning of the words. A sudden rush of anger scattered his thoughts; he said violently:

"Once more, it's not a question of a wench, nor of a married woman, but of a young girl whom you've deceived, if not by promises, at any rate by your manner, which is, let me tell you, not the behaviour of a sportsman . . . nor of a decent man. . . ."

Gontran, pale, his voice trembling with rage, interrupted him:

"That'll do. . . . You've said too much already . . . and I've listened to too much of it. . . . And now I'll say something to you: if I were not your friend I . . . I'd let you know that I've a short temper. One word more, and I've done with you for ever."

Then, slowly, choosing the words carefully, he flung them in Paul's face:

"I have no explanation to give you. . . . I'd be more within my rights if I asked one of you. . . . I'll tell you what is not the behaviour of a sportsman or a decent man, and that is to let himself lapse into a gross error of taste — which can take more forms than one — from which friendship ought to restrain some persons . . . and which love does not excuse. . . ."

With an abrupt change of tone to one of light-hearted mockery, he said:

"As for little Charlotte, if you feel so tenderly towards her and find her so charming, take her and marry her.

Marriage is often a solution in difficult cases. It is a solution and a stronghold in which a man can barricade himself against haunting despairs. She is pretty and rich. . . . And you've got to come to some such arrangement in the end. It would be amusing for us both to get married here on the same day, for I am going to marry the elder. I'm telling you in confidence, don't repeat it yet. . . . Now don't forget that you have less right than anyone to speak of honour in affairs of the heart or delicacy of sentiment at any time. Now attend to your own affairs. I'll attend to mine. Good evening."

And, swinging round abruptly on his heel, he turned back to the village. Paul Brétigny, his thoughts in confusion and sick at heart, walked slowly back to the Mont-Oriol Hotel.

He tried desperately to understand, to recall each word so that he could determine its exact sense, and he was amazed by the secret twists, the unavowable and shameful twists hidden away in some men's minds.

When Christiane asked him: "What did Gontran say to you?" he stammered:

"Well, damn it, he . . . he prefers the elder girl now. . . . I even believe that he wants to marry her. And when I reproached him rather sharply, he shut my mouth by allusions . . . disturbing . . . for both of us."

Christiane dropped into a chair, murmuring:

"Oh, my God! . . . my God!"

But Gontran entered, the dinner bell having rung for dinner, and kissed her gaily on the forehead, asking:

"Well, little sister, how are you? Not too tired?"

Then he shook Paul's hand and, turning to Andermatt, who had entered behind him, said:

"Now then, pearl of brothers-in-law, husbands, and friends, can you tell me just what a dead donkey on a road is worth?"

IV

Andermatt and Doctor Latonne were walking in front of the Casino, on the terrace ornamented by vases of imitation marble.

"He doesn't speak to me now," said the doctor, speaking of his colleague Bonnefille. "He stays down there, like a wild boar in his lair. I believe he'd poison our springs if he could."

Andermatt, his hands behind his back, his hat — a small grey bowler — pushed on to the back of his head and revealing the baldness on top, was deep in thought. He said, at last:

"Oh, in three months' time the company will have thrown up the sponge. We're only ten thousand francs off it. It's that old fool Bonnefille who works them up against me and makes them believe I'll give in. But he's mistaken."

The new inspector added:

"You know their Casino has been shut since yesterday. They hadn't a single visitor."

"Yes, I know. But we ourselves don't get enough people here. They stay in the hotels too much; and people get bored in hotels, my dear. We must amuse the people taking the waters, interest them, make them find the season too short. Those staying at our Mont-Oriol Hotel come every evening because they're quite near, but the others hesitate and stay at home. It's a question of the way here, not another thing. Success is always the result of unseen causes, and you've got to know how to find out what they are. The roads leading

to a place of entertainment must themselves be entertaining; they must be the beginning of the enjoyment to come.

"The paths leading here are bad, stony, hard: they make people tired. When a road leading to some place where you have a vague desire to be is pleasant, wide, shady in the daytime, a smooth gentle ascent in the evening, people inevitably choose it in preference to all others. If you only realised how the body cherishes the memory of a thousand things that the spirit has not taken the trouble to retain! I believe that the memories of animals work in that way. You may have been thinking of something else at the time, but if you found the way to a place uncomfortably hot, if you made your feet tired on badly broken stones, if the road climbed too steeply, you'll experience an overwhelming physical repugnance to returning to that place. You were talking with a friend, you never noticed the small discomforts of the walk, you observed nothing, remembered nothing; but your legs, your muscles, your lungs, your whole body has not forgotten them, and when your mind wants to take you over the same road again, they say to it: 'No, I won't go, it was too painful.' And the mind obeys this refusal without argument, yielding to the unspoken message of the companions who carry it.

"So we must have fine roads, which brings us back to the fact that I must have the land belonging to old Oriol, the obstinate ass. But patience. . . . And that reminds me, Mas-Roussel has become owner of his chalet on the same conditions as Rémusot. It's a small sacrifice for which they will amply indemnify us. So try to find out just what Cloche's intentions are."

"He'll follow their example," said the doctor. "But there's one other thing I've been thinking about for some days that we've completely forgotten. That's the meteorological bulletin."

“What meteorological bulletin?”

“In the big Paris papers. It’s absolutely necessary. The temperature of a thermal spa must be better, less variable, more evenly regulated than that of neighbouring rival spas. You will take and pay for space in the meteorological bulletin in all the principal organs of opinion, and I will wire them the atmospheric situation every evening. I’ll fix it so that the average calculated at the end of the year will be better than the best average of all the places in the neighbourhood. The first thing that jumps to the eye, when you open the big newspaper, is the temperature of Vichy, Royat, Mont-Dore, Châtel-Guyon, etc., etc., during the summer season, and, in the winter season, of Cannes, Mentone, Nice, Saint-Raphaël. It must always be warm and fine in these places, my dear sir, so that the Parisian will say: ‘Christ, they’re lucky, the people who go there!’”

Andermatt cried:

“Damn it, you’re right! Why didn’t I think of it? I’ll go and see about it this very day. And, talking about useful moves, have you written to Professors de Larenard and Pascalis? They’re two men I’d gladly see here.”

“Unapproachable, my dear president . . . unless . . . unless they become convinced of themselves, after long experience, that our waters are excellent. . . . But you won’t do anything in that quarter by persuasions . . . beforehand.”

They passed Paul and Gontran, who had come to drink coffee after their lunch. Other visitors were arriving, men for the most part: the women always go up to their bedrooms for an hour or two when they leave the table. Petrus Martel was keeping an eye on his waitress and calling: “One kümmel, one brandy, one anisette,” in the same deep sonorous voice that an hour later he would be using to direct the rehearsal and give the note to the *jeune première*.

Andermatt paused a few moments to talk to the two young men, then continued his walk beside the inspector.

Gontran was smoking, legs crossed, arms folded, lolling in his chair with his head resting on the back, eyes and cigar both lifted to heaven, utterly and perfectly happy.

Suddenly he asked:

"Would you like to go out to the little valley of Sans-Souci after a while? The girls will be there."

Paul hesitated; then, after reflecting a little:

"Yes, I'd like it very much."

Then he added:

"Your little affair going on all right?"

"Lord, yes! I've got her: she won't get away from me now."

Gontran now regarded his friend as a confidant, and day by day related to him his progress and his gains. He even made him accompany him, an accomplice, to his rendezvous, for he had, in a most ingenious manner, managed to arrange meetings with Louise Oriol.

After the excursion to the Puy de la Nugère, Christiane put a stop to expeditions; she hardly went out at all, making meetings very difficult.

At first this attitude worried her brother, and he had sought a way of getting himself out of the difficulty.

Accustomed to the manners of Paris, where men of his kind look upon women as game which is often difficult to bring down, he had in former days made use of various ruses to approach the women he coveted. No one else was more skilful in the art of employing intermediaries, discovering complaisant and interested women, and judging at a glance which men or women would favour his plans.

Christiane's unconscious assistance thus suddenly failing him, he had looked about for the necessary link, the "easy soul," to quote his own words, who might replace his sister; and his choice very quickly fell on Doctor

Honorat's wife. Several reasons pointed to her. In the first place, her husband was very intimate with the Oriols and had looked after the family for twenty years. He had helped to bring the children into the world; he dined with them every Sunday, and entertained them at his own table every Tuesday. His wife, a fat old vulgarian, with aspirations, easily got at through her vanity, would assuredly be only too glad to serve the Comte de Ravenel, whose brother-in-law owned the Mont-Oriol establishment.

Furthermore, Gontran, who was a good judge of bawds, had — after merely watching her go past in the street — decided that she was designed by nature for the job. She had, thought he, the look of one, and a person who has the look of a go-between has the soul of one too.

So he went into her house one day, when he had accompanied her husband to his door. He had sat down, talked, complimented the lady, and at dinner-time he had observed, as he got up to go:

“You have an appetising smell here. You feed better than we do at the hotel.”

Madame Honorat, swelling with pride, stammered:

“Goodness! . . . if I dared . . . if only I dared, Count . . .”

“If you dared what, dear lady?”

“Ask you to share our modest meal.”

“Upon my word . . . I'd say ‘yes.’”

The doctor murmured uneasily:

“But we've nothing, simply nothing: soup, beef, a bird, that's all.”

Gontran laughed:

“That's all I want. I'll stay.”

And he had dined with the Honorats. The unwieldy woman got up, seized the dishes from the maid's hands lest the latter should spill sauce on the table-cloth, and,

in spite of her husband's irritated remonstrances, served the whole dinner herself.

The count had complimented her on her cooking, her house, her kindness, and left her quite beside herself with delight.

He paid his gratitude call, and allowed himself to be invited again, and was now a frequent visitor at Madame Honorat's house, where the Oriol girls, too, had for many years been in the habit of coming at all hours of the day, as neighbours and friends.

So he spent hours there in the company of the three women, making himself agreeable to both sisters, but every day showing more plainly his marked preference for Louise.

The jealousy that had sprung up between them from the moment he began to pay attentions to Charlotte, took on an aspect of deadly enmity on the elder's part, and scorn on the younger's. Louise, with her air of reserve, put into her reticences and her shy attitude towards Gontran more coquetry and encouragement than ever the other girl had done, with all her frank and joyous abandon. Charlotte, wounded to the heart, hid her pain for pride's sake, seeming to see nothing, understand nothing, and continuing to come with a fine show of indifference to all these meetings at the Honorat's house. She would not stay at home for fear anyone should think she was unhappy, that she was weeping, or had given way before her sister.

Too pleased with his malicious strategy to hide it, Gontran could not refrain from telling Paul all about it. And Paul, finding it amusing, burst into laughter. He had, moreover, since his friend's ambiguous remarks, sworn to meddle no more in his affairs, and he often wondered uneasily: "Does he know anything about Christiane and me?"

He knew Gontran too well to believe him incapable

of shutting his eyes to his sister's liaison. But why had he not long since made it evident that he guessed or that he knew? Gontran was, indeed, one of those men who believe that all women of the world must have a lover or lovers, who regard the family as merely a society for mutual help, morality as an indispensable pose that cloaks the diverse tastes with which nature has endowed us, and social honourableness as the façade behind which we conceal the more pleasing vices. And if he had urged his young sister to marry Andermatt, was it not with the vague, if not with the quite definite, idea that this Jew would be exploited in every way by the whole family? And he might as heartily have despised Christiane for remaining faithful to this useful convenience of a husband, as he would have despised himself for refraining from dipping deep into his brother-in-law's purse.

Paul thought of all this, and it troubled his quixotic soul, which was nevertheless not averse to compromise. So he had adopted an air of reserve towards this enigmatic friend of his.

But when Gontran had told him of the use he was making of Madame Honorat, Brétigny had laughed, and had even, during the last few days, consented to go to the woman's house, and he enjoyed talking to Charlotte.

The doctor's wife lent herself with the best grace in the world to the rôle assigned to her, dispensed tea towards five o'clock like the good ladies of Paris, with little cakes made by her own hand.

The first time that Paul found his way into her house, she received him as if he were an old friend, made him sit down, relieved him, despite his protests, of his hat, which she placed on the chimney-piece, beside the clock. Then, eager and excited, she drifted from one to the other, monstrous and pot-bellied, asking:

“Do you feel like eating a little?”

Gontran talked cheerful nonsense, joked and laughed, completely at his ease. He drew Louise into the recess of a window for a few moments, under Charlotte's troubled eye.

Madame Honorat, who was talking to Paul, said to him, in a maternal tone of voice:

"Dear children, they come here to spend a few minutes together. It's quite innocent, isn't it, Monsieur Brétigny?"

"Oh, very innocent, madame."

On his next visit, she called him, familiarly, "Monsieur Paul," treating him rather like a boon companion.

After which Gontran took to describing with his none too subtle and boisterous humour all the complaisant little ways of the lady, to whom on the previous day he had said:

"Why do you never walk with the young ladies along the road to Sans-Souci?"

"But we will, Count, we will."

"To-morrow, about three o'clock, perhaps."

"To-morrow, about three o'clock, Count."

"You are too kind, Madame Honorat."

"At your service, Count."

And Gontran explained to Paul:

"You see, in the drawing-room I can't talk seriously to the elder girl, with the younger one in the room. But in the wood I go on in front or I stay behind with Louise. You'll come then?"

"Yes, I'd like to."

"Come along."

They stood up and walked off slowly down the high road; then, crossing the Roche-Pradière road, they turned to the left, climbed down through the tangled greenery into the little wooded valley. When they had crossed the river, they sat down beside the path to wait.

The three women arrived very shortly, walking in single file, Louise in front and Madame Honorat behind.

Both parties appeared surprised by the meeting.

Gontran cried:

"Well, what an excellent idea of yours to come this way!"

The doctor's wife answered:

"Ah, it was my idea!"

And they walked along together.

Louise and Gontran quickened their steps little by little; they got on in front and drew so far away that they were lost to sight in the windings of the narrow road.

The stout old woman, who was quite puffing and blowing, threw an indulgent glance in their direction and murmured:

"Phew, it's you young people that have legs! I can't go after them."

Charlotte cried:

"Wait! I'll go and call them back."

She darted forward. The doctor's wife restrained her.

"Don't you worry, dearie, if they want to talk. It's not wise to disturb them: they'll come back all right by themselves."

And she sat down on the grass, in the shade of a pine-tree, and fanned herself with her handkerchief. Charlotte gave Paul a distressed glance, a desolate imploring glance.

He understood and said:

"Very well, mademoiselle, we'll leave Madame to rest, and go and join your sister yourselves."

"Oh, yes, monsieur," she answered impulsively.

Madame Honorat made no objection.

"Run along, children, run along. I'll wait for you here. Don't be too long."

So they went off, too. They walked quickly at first;

they could no longer see the other two, and hoped to overtake them; then, after walking some minutes, they thought that Louise and Gontran must have turned aside, and Charlotte called, in a timid trembling voice. No one answered her. She murmured: "Oh, heavens, where are they?"

Again Paul felt the same overwhelming rush of pity and sorrowful compassion that had surged through him once before, beside the crater of Nugère.

He did not know what to say to this unhappy child. He felt a violent desire, a fatherly desire, to take her in his arms, to caress her and find for her gentle and comforting words. What could he say? She was turning to every side, peering through the branches with wild eyes, listening to the least sounds; she stammered:

"I think they're through here. . . . No, through there. . . . Don't you hear anything?"

"No, mademoiselle, I don't hear anything. We'd better wait for them here."

"Oh, heavens! . . . No. . . . We must find them."

He hesitated a moment, and then said to her, in a low voice:

"It hurts you so much, does it?"

She lifted dismayed eyes in which the tears were just welling, spreading over her eyes a filmy veil of crystal drops still kept from falling by eyelids fringed with long brown lashes. She tried to speak, and could not, dared not, though her heart, swelling heavy with pent-up grief, was in sore need of outlet.

He went on:

"So you loved him very dearly. . . . He doesn't deserve your love, upon my word."

She could restrain herself no longer, and, putting her hands over her eyes to hide her tears, said:

"No. . . . No. . . . I don't love him . . . it is too cruel of him to behave like this. . . . He has been playing with

me . . . it's too cruel . . . it's too cowardly . . . but it hurts me, all the same . . . very badly . . . because it's unkind . . . very unkind . . . very unkind . . . it is. . . . But what makes me most unhappy is my sister . . . my sister . . . she doesn't love me any more . . . she . . . and she's been wickeder than he has. . . . I know she doesn't love me any more . . . not any more at all. . . . I know she detests me. . . . I've only got her . . . I haven't anybody else . . . and I haven't done anything, I haven't."

He saw only her ear and her soft childish neck that curved to the collar of her frock and down under the thin gown to rounder curves. And he felt overwhelmed with compassion and tenderness, stirred by the impulsive longing to serve in some devoted way that swept him off his feet whenever his heart was touched by a woman. His heart, that could so readily be stirred to wild enthusiasm, was stirred now to its very depths by this innocent hurt child, disturbing, naïve, and cruelly charming as she was.

He stretched out a hand towards her, with the unconscious gesture he would have made to caress and soothe a child, and he laid it on her back, just below the shoulder. He felt the laboured beating of her heart, like the little heart of a bird caught and held.

The hurried ceaseless beating pulsed through his arm towards his own heart, which began to beat the faster. He felt the rapid thud, thud, coming from her body, surging into his through flesh and muscle and nerve, until they were only one heart that suffered the same pain, was shaken by the same vibration, lived by the same impulse, like those clocks joined by a wire that makes them keep time together second by second.

But abruptly she took her hands from a flushed face, pretty in spite of the tears, rubbed it dry, and said:

"I oughtn't to have talked to you like that. Let's

go back to Madame Honorat at once and forget it. . . .
Promise me?"

"Yes, I promise."

She held out her hand to him.

"I trust you. I am sure that you, at least, are sincere."

They retraced their steps. He carried her across the stream, as the year before he had carried Christiane. Christiane! How many times he had come along this road with her, in the days when he adored her. He thought, amazed by his own fickleness: "How soon passion dies!"

Charlotte laid a finger on his arm, and murmured:

"Madame Honorat is asleep; let's sit down very quietly."

Madame Honorat was indeed asleep, with her back against a pine-tree, her handkerchief over her face, and her hands folded on her stomach. They sat down a few paces from her, and did not talk, for fear of waking her.

The silence of the wood was so deep that they felt it like a physical pain. There was no sound but the water running over the stones near by, and the silent-footed passing of tiny creatures of the wood, the confused murmur of hovering flies on the wing or of big black insects rustling among the dead leaves.

Where were Louise and Gontran? What were they doing? Suddenly they heard them in the distance: they were coming back. Madame Honorat woke up, and, surprised, said:

"Well, I never! Are you here? I never heard you coming. . . . And the others, did you find them?"

Paul answered:

"Here they are. They're just coming."

They recognised Gontran's laughter. His laugh lifted a dreadful weight that was pressing on Charlotte's heart. She could not have said why.

A moment later they came into sight. Gontran was almost running, pulling the blushing girl along by her arm. He began speaking before he reached them, he was in such a hurry to tell his tale.

"Do you know whom we fell across? I'll tell you straight out. The beautiful Mazelli with the daughter of the illustrious Professor Cloche, as Will would say, the pretty, red-haired widow. . . . Oh, my goodness! . . . Fell across . . . you understand . . . fell across! . . . The rascal was embracing her. . . . Oh, Lord! . . . oh, Lord!"

In the presence of his untimely mirth, Madame Honorat had a dignified moment:

"Oh, Count, remember the young ladies!"

Gontran made a low bow.

"You are quite right, dear lady, to remind me of my manners. Your sensibilities are always utterly right."

Then, in order not to arrive back together, the two young men said good-bye to the ladies and returned across the wood.

"Well?" Paul asked.

"Well, I told her that I adored her, and longed to marry her."

"And what did she say?"

"She said, with admirable prudence: 'That's for my father to decide. My answer depends on him.'"

"Then what are you going to do?"

"Send my ambassador Andermatt off at once with the formal demand. And if the old peasant cuts up rough, I shall compromise the girl by making a splendid scene."

And as Andermatt was still talking to Doctor Latonne on the terrace of the Casino, Gontran separated them and put his brother-in-law in immediate possession of all the facts.

Paul walked out towards Riom. He needed to be alone, a prey to that profound disturbance of mind which

a man suffers each time he meets the woman with whom he is half in love.

For a long time now, he had surrendered himself — hardly conscious of what he did — to the unspoiled and heady charm of this forlorn child. He saw her as so sweet-natured, so good, so simple, so honest, so naïve, that at first he had been moved to pity, the tender pity that a woman's distress always inspires in us. Then, seeing her often, he had let the seed grow in his heart, the tiny seed of tenderness that falls so readily into our hearts and grows so swiftly. And now, particularly since the last hour, he was beginning to feel himself possessed by her, to carry about with him that sense of the constant presence of an absent woman which is the first sign of love.

He walked along the road, haunted by the memory of her glance, the sound of her voice, the sight of her mouth curved in a smile or drooping with grief, the charm of her bearing, by the very colour and rustle of her gown.

And the thought: "I believe I'm really caught. I know what I am. It's the very devil. Perhaps I had better go back to Paris. Damn it, she's a decently brought-up girl. I can't make her my mistress."

Then he began to think of her in just the same way as last year he had thought of Christiane. How this girl, too, was unlike all the women he had known, born and bred in the city, different even from other carefully brought-up girls, who from their first childhood have learned their lesson from watching the flirtations of their mothers or the casual flirtations of the streets. She had none of the tortuous allurements of the woman bent on charming, no artifice in words, nothing studied in her manner, nothing insincere in her gaze.

Not only was she an untouched and unspoiled creature, but she came of primitive stock, she was a true daughter

of the soil, standing on the threshold of becoming a woman of the world.

And his thoughts became lyrical, pleading for her against the half-conscious resistance that lingered on in his mind. The characters of romantic novels flitted before his eyes, the creations of Walter Scott, Dickens, and George Sand, stimulating still further an imagination always powerfully affected by women.

Gontran had said of him: "Paul! He's a horse with the bit between his teeth and a love-affair astride him. When he throws one, another leaps on to his back."

Brétigny realised that night was falling. He had been walking for a long time. He turned back.

As he walked past the new baths, he saw Andermatt and the two Oriols surveying and measuring the vines; and he perceived by their manner that the discussion was heated.

An hour later Will walked into the drawing-room where the entire family was assembled, and said to the marquis:

"My dear father-in-law, I have to tell you that your son Gontran is going to marry Mademoiselle Louise Oriol in six or eight weeks' time."

Monsieur de Ravenel was aghast.

"Gontran? What did you say?"

"I said that in six or eight weeks' time he intends — with your consent — to marry Mademoiselle Lousie Oriol, who will be a very rich woman."

Whereupon the marquis said simply:

"Damn it, if it's what he wants, I'm quite willing."

And the banker told them all about the bargain he had made with the old peasant.

As soon as the count had told him that the young girl would consent, he had thought it well to get the vine-grower's consent, at one sitting, leaving him no time to prepare a series of wily moves.

So he hurried off to his house and found him painfully making up his accounts on a scrap of greasy paper, with the help of Colosse, who was adding up on his fingers.

Sitting down, "I'd very much like to drink a glass of your excellent wine," said he.

As soon as big Jacques returned with glasses and a brimming jug, he asked if Mademoiselle Louise had come home; then asked that she should be called in. When she stood in front of him, he rose and, making her a low bow, said:

"Mademoiselle, will you look upon me just now as a friend to whom you can speak freely? You will, won't you? Well, I have been entrusted with a very delicate mission with regard to you. My brother-in-law, Count Raoul-Olivier-Gontran de Ravenel, has fallen in love with you, on which I congratulate him, and has requested me to ask you, in front of your family, if you will consent to become his wife."

Thus taken by surprise, she turned a troubled gaze towards her father. And old Oriol, startled, looked at his son, his usual adviser; and Colosse looked at Andermatt, who added, a little stiffly:

"You understand, mademoiselle, that I undertook this mission with the sole idea of getting an immediate reply to my brother-in-law's offer. He is fully conscious that he may not have been lucky enough to win your affection, in which event he will leave the place to-morrow, never to return. I am sure, further, that you know him well enough to say to me, a mere intermediary: 'I will,' or 'I won't.'"

She looked down and, blushing but resolute, stammered: "I will gladly, monsieur."

Then she fled so precipitately that she collided with the door as she rushed through.

Then Andermatt sat down again and, drinking off a

glass of wine, peasant-fashion, "Now we can talk business," said he.

And without admitting that there could be the least possibility of a hesitation, he plunged into the question of the dowry, making use of the statements made to him by the vine-grower three weeks previously. He valued Gontran's actual fortune at three hundred thousand francs plus expectations, and he made it apparent that if a man like the Comte de Ravenel condescended to ask the hand of the Oriol girl, charming creature as she was, it went without question that the young lady's family would know how to recognise the honour by a monetary sacrifice.

Whereupon the peasant, very disconcerted but flattered, almost disarmed, tried to defend his riches. The discussion was a long one. One statement made by Andermatt had, however, facilitated it from the start.

"We're not asking for cash down or a cheque, only for the land that you have already pointed out to me as forming Mademoiselle Louise's dowry, plus some other land that I will specify"

The prospect of not having to part with money, money slowly heaped together, brought into the house franc by franc, sou by sou, the good white and yellow money, worn by the constant touch of hands, purses, pockets, café tables, and the deep drawers of old cupboards, money which was the jingling tale of so much effort, anxiety, toil, and fatigue, dearer than cattle, vines, fields, dearer than the house they lived in, the money that was sometimes harder to sacrifice than life itself — the prospect that they would not have to see it go with the girl brought at once a great peace, a desire to be conciliatory, a secret but restrained joy into the minds of father and son.

They continued the discussion, nevertheless, with intent to keep back some few yards of land. The detailed plan of Mont-Oriol was spread out on the table and, one

by one, the portions given to Louise were marked with a cross. It took Andermatt an hour to make sure of the last two lots. Then, so that neither side could spring a surprise on the other, they walked all over the property in question, with the plan. The portions marked by a cross were carefully surveyed and outlined afresh.

But Andermatt was uneasy: he suspected the two Oriols capable of repudiating at their first conference some part of the concessions now agreed upon, and trying to take back parts of the vineyard, and strips of land he needed for his projects. He tried to think of a safe and practical means of getting their agreement set out in some definite form.

An idea flashed across his mind; it made him smile at first, and then he decided that it was excellent, fantastic as it was.

"If you like," he said, "we'll just write all that down, so as not to forget any of it later."

And when they returned to the village, he stopped at the tobacco-shop to buy two pieces of stamped paper. He knew that the list of lands, set forth on these legal pieces of paper, would assume an almost sacred character in the eyes of the peasants, for these papers represented the law, the always invisible and threatening law, defended by the police, fines, and prison.

So he wrote on one and copied on the other: "In consideration of the promise of marriage between Count Gontran de Ravenel and Mlle. Louise Oriol, M. Oriol senior gives to his daughter as dowry the properties hereinafter designated. . . ." And he enumerated them minutely, giving each one its number in the property register of the district.

Then, dating and signing it, he extracted the signature of old Oriol, who in his turn had insisted upon inserting the amount of the fiancé's fortune, and he went off to the hotel, carrying the paper in his pocket.

MONT-ORIOL

Everyone laughed at his tale, and Gontran more heartily than anyone. Then, with a vastly dignified air, the marquis said to his son:

“This evening we will both call on the family, and I will myself renew the request first proffered by my son-in-law, in order to make it more in order.”

V

Gontran was a perfect fiancé, as charming as he was devoted. He gave everyone presents bought with Andermatt's money and he paid frequent visits to the young girl, either at her own house or at Madame Honorat's. Paul went with him almost every time now, to meet Charlotte again, resolving after each visit never to see her again.

She had resigned herself bravely to her sister's marriage; even talked of it quite easily, appearing to feel no bitterness now. Only her manner seemed a little changed, more poised, less ingenuous. Brétigny, while Gontran made low-voiced love to Louise in a corner of the room, talked to her gravely, slowly surrendering himself to her charm, letting his heart drown in his new love as in a rising tide. He knew it and made no resistance, thinking: "Oh, well, when the time comes, I shall go away, that's all." And when he left her, he went to see Christiane, who spent the whole day now lying on a couch. As soon as he came into the room, he felt himself growing nervous, irritated, ready to fall into the countless little quarrels born of weariness. Everything she said, everything she did, annoyed him in advance; angry words, that his innate breeding restrained, sprang to his lips at the sight of her air of suffering, her resigned attitude, and her reproachful imploring gaze. He sat beside her and thought all the time, seeing her image in his mind's eye, of the young girl he had just left.

Since Christiane, wretched because she saw him so seldom, overwhelmed him with questions on the way he

spent his days, he invented tales to which she listened eagerly, trying to find out whether he was thinking of some other woman. Feeling herself powerless to hold this man, powerless to impart to him a little of the love that tortured her, physically unable to please him now, to win him back by caresses since she could not get him back by affection, she feared the worst without knowing where to fix her fearful suspicions.

She was vaguely conscious of some danger hanging over her, an unknown terrible danger. She suffered from an abstract indefinite jealousy, she was jealous of everyone, she was jealous of the women who passed her window and seemed to her charming, without knowing whether Brétigny had ever spoken to them.

She asked him:

“Have you noticed a very pretty woman, a dark woman, fairly tall, whom I have seen sometimes? She must have just come lately.”

When he answered: “No, I don’t know her,” she suspected a lie at once, turned pale, and persisted:

“But you simply must have seen her; I thought she was uncommonly beautiful.”

Astonished by her persistence, he told her:

“I assure you I haven’t seen her. I’ll try and come across her.”

She thought: “It must be she.” There were days when she felt sure that he was carrying on a secret intrigue in the town, that he had brought a mistress to the place, his actress perhaps. And she questioned everybody, her father, her brother, and her husband, about all the young and desirable women who were to be seen in Enval.

If she had only been able to go out, to look for herself, she would have been able to reassure herself a little, but her almost complete imprisonment in the house was a source of intolerable anguish to her. And when she

spoke to Paul, the mere tone of her voice expressed her unhappiness and aggravated the nervous impatience he felt for this dead love-affair.

He could talk calmly to her about only one thing, Gontran's approaching marriage, which allowed him to speak Charlotte's name and to talk freely about the young girl. He even took a vague mysterious and inexplicable pleasure in hearing Christiane utter her name, and praise the child's charm and all her virtues, pity her, regret that her brother had sacrificed her, and wish that a man, an honourable upright man, would see her worth, love her, and marry her.

He said:

"Yes, Gontran has made a mistake there. She's a charming child."

Christiane unsuspiciously repeated:

"Very charming. She is a jewel! Quite perfect!"

It had never entered her head that a man like Paul could fall in love with a very young girl and might one day want to marry. She was afraid only of his mistresses.

And, by a strange emotional reaction, praise of Charlotte in Christiane's mouth seemed to him the highest possible commendation, deepened his love, inflamed his desire, and endowed the young girl with an irresistible attraction.

Then, one day, when he went with Gontran to Madame Honorat's to meet the Oriol girls, he found Dr. Mazelli installed there as if he were quite at home.

He held out his two hands to the two men, with his Italian smile that seemed to offer his whole heart with every word and every gesture.

Gontran and he shared a familiar and superficial friendship, made up of secret affinities and hidden likenesses, a sort of identity of instinct rather than real affection or confidence.

The count asked:

"And your pretty blonde of Sans-Souci wood?"

The Italian smiled:

"Oh, we're no longer friends. She's one of those women who offer all and give nothing."

Everyone began to talk. The handsome doctor was very attentive to the young girls, especially to Charlotte. When he talked to women, voice and manner and looks expressed an unwavering adoration. His whole body, from head to foot, said to them: "I love you," with an eloquence of manner that invariably won them to him.

He had the graces of an actress, the airy pirouettes of a dancer, the supple gestures of a juggler, a complete science of natural and deliberate seduction which he never ceased to employ.

Paul, returning with Gontran to the hotel, exclaimed ungraciously:

"What on earth is that mountebank doing in that house?"

The count replied sweetly:

"Does anyone ever know, with these adventurers? People like that slip in everywhere. This one is probably tired of his vagabond life, of obeying the whims of his Spanish lady; he's more like her valet than her doctor, and perhaps something more. He looks round. Professor Cloche's daughter was a good thing, but it didn't come off. The younger Oriol girl would suit him just as well. He tries, he feels, he sniffs, he sounds. He will become co-proprietor of the waters, he will try to trip up that idiot of a Latonne, and at the least will get together every summer an excellent clientele for the winter. Gad, that's his scheme! . . . I'll take my oath on it."

Unreasoning anger and a jealous dislike woke in Paul's heart.

A voice called:

"Hi! hi!"

It was Mazelli; he came to them.

Brétigny spoke to him in a voice insolently ironical.

"Where are you running so fast, doctor? You look as though you were chasing fortune."

The Italian smiled; he did not stop but, stepping backwards, plunged his two hands in his pockets with the graceful gesture of a harlequin, turned them lightly inside out, and, holding them between two fingers by the edge of the seams, revealed their complete emptiness. Then he said:

"I haven't found it yet."

And, pirouetting elegantly round on his toes, he rushed off like a man in a terrific hurry.

During the days that followed, they found him several times at Doctor Honorat's house, where he made himself useful to the three women by endless little polite services, by the same quick tact and adaptability that must have been useful to him in pleasing the duchess. He was perfect at everything he undertook, from compliments to macaroni. He was, moreover, an excellent cook and, protected from harm by a blue kitchen apron, with a chef's cap made of paper on his head, and singing Neapolitan songs in Italian, he busied himself among pots and pans without making himself in the least ridiculous, to the delight and amusement of everybody, even the idiot servant who said of him: "He's like Jesus."

His intentions were soon made clear, and Paul could no longer doubt that he was trying to make Charlotte love him.

He seemed to be succeeding with her. He was so assiduous, so eager, so subtly quick to please, that when the young girl saw him, her face showed quite plainly the pleasure she felt.

Whereat Paul, half unaware of his own attitude, assumed the rôle of a lover and behaved accordingly. As

soon as he saw the doctor with Charlotte, he came up and in his directer fashion strove to win the young girl's affection. He showed her a blunt tenderness, he was brotherly, attentive, and told her with the most friendly sincerity and in so frank a manner that it could hardly be supposed an avowal of love:

“I'm frightfully fond of you.”

Mazelli, surprised at this unexpected rivalry, used every art at his command, and when Brétigny — torn by jealousy, by the primitive jealousy that seizes on a man in the presence of any woman that pleases him, whether he loves her or not — when Brétigny, naturally violent as he was, became aggressive and haughty, the other, suaver, always master of himself, retorted by an infinite delicacy of attack, by subtleties, by adroit and mocking compliments.

It was a daily struggle in which both sides fought tooth and nail, though probably neither had any definite end in view. They would not give way, like two dogs hanging on to the same prey.

Charlotte had recovered her cheerful humour, but her wit had a sharper edge, and there was something a shade enigmatic and less ingenuous in her smile and her glance. It was as though Gontran's desertion had taught her wisdom, prepared her for the possibility of deception, quickened her wits and armed her. She manœuvred between the two lovers with an acute and subtle skill, saying the right thing to each of them, never rousing one against the other, never allowing either to suppose that she preferred the other, ridiculing Paul a little to the doctor and the doctor to Paul, putting them both on a perfect equality of footing without seeming to take either of them seriously. But it was all done with the utmost simplicity, a schoolgirl amusing herself, not a flirt, and with the mischievous gaiety that very young girls have, and which sometimes makes them irresistible.

Mazelli, however, suddenly assumed the advantage. He seemed to become more intimate with her, as if a secret understanding existed between them. When he talked to her, he played lightly with her parasol and with a ribbon of her gown, which impressed Paul as being somehow an act of moral possession, and exasperated him to such a pitch that he longed to box the Italian's ears.

But one day, in old Oriol's house, when Brétigny was talking to Louise and Gontran, and keeping an eye on Mazelli, whose low-voiced conversation with Charlotte was making her smile, he saw her blush quickly and look so disturbed that he could not for a moment doubt that the other man had spoken of love. She had lowered her eyes; she ceased to smile but not to listen; Paul felt himself on the verge of making a scene, and said to Gontran:

"I'd be grateful if you'd come out with me for five minutes."

The count excused himself to his fiancée and followed his friend.

As soon as they were in the street, Paul exclaimed:

"My dear, we must at all costs prevent that Italian bounder from seducing that child, who has absolutely no defence against him!"

"Well, but what do you want me to do?"

"Warn her against this adventurer."

"Well, really, my dear, it's not my business."

"She's going to be your sister-in-law, after all."

"Yes, but I have no certain proof that Mazelli's intentions towards her are of the worst. He makes love to every woman he loves in just the same way, and he has never done or said anything questionable."

"Very well, since you won't take it on, I shall have to do it myself, though it's a good deal less my business than yours."

"So you're in love with Charlotte?"

"I . . . no . . . but I can see through that scoundrel's game."

"You're meddling in a delicate matter, my dear . . . and . . . unless you love Charlotte . . . ?"

"No . . . I'm not in love with her . . . but I always want to smash these adventurers."

"May I ask what you intend to do?"

"Slap the cad's face."

"Excellent, the best way to make her fall in love with him. You fight, and whether he wounds you or you wound him, she'll look upon him as a hero."

"Then what would you do?"

"In your place?"

"In my place."

"I should talk to the child as a friend. She has great confidence in you. Well, I should tell her quite plainly in so many words, just what these freebooters of society are. You know just how to say these things. You've a genius for it. And I should make her understand, first, why he was in attendance on the Spanish woman; second, why he attempted the siege of Professor Cloche's daughter; third, why, having failed in his attempt, he is, as a last resort, trying so hard to conquer Mademoiselle Charlotte Oriol."

"Why don't you do it? You're going to be her brother-in-law."

"Because . . . because . . . on account of what happened between us . . . don't you know . . . I can't."

"You're right. I'll talk to her."

"Would you like me to give you a chance to talk to her alone right away?"

"Of course I would."

"Good. You go and walk about for ten minutes, I'll go and carry off Louise and the Mazelli, and when you come back you'll find the girl all alone."

Paul Brétigny wandered beside the gorges of Enval,

turning over in his mind how best to set about this difficult conversation.

He did indeed find Charlotte Oriol alone in the cold whitewashed drawing-room of the paternal mansion; and, sitting down beside her, he said to her:

“Mademoiselle, I asked Gontran to get me this interview with you.”

She looked at him with her clear eyes:

“But why?”

“Oh, not to talk Italian nonsense to you, but to speak to you as a friend, a very devoted friend, who feels bound to give you a piece of advice.”

“Go on.”

He approached the subject cautiously, relying on his own experience and her inexperience, to introduce very gently a discreet but unequivocal homily on adventurers who roam the world in search of fortunes, exploiting by their professional skill all the good simple creatures, men or women, whose purses and hearts are open to them.

She had paled a little, and she listened to him gravely, all ears.

“I understand, and I don’t understand. You’re talking of some particular person. Who is it?” she asked.

“I’m talking of Doctor Mazelli.”

She looked down and for a few moments made no reply; then, in a hesitating voice:

“You are so frank that I will be frank, too. Since . . . since the . . . since my sister’s betrothal, I have grown a little less . . . a little less stupid. Well, I suspected already what you’ve been telling me . . . and I was only amusing myself with his visits.”

She had lifted her face, and her smile, her clear gaze, her little tip-tilted nose, the sudden soft gleam of teeth between her lips, revealed such sincere good nature, such gay malice, such charming mischief, that Brétigny felt himself swept towards her by one of those overpowering

impulses that threw him, wild with desire, at the feet of his latest beloved. His heart leaped for joy that Mazelli was not the favoured one. So he, he had triumphed!

He asked:

“Then you don’t love him?”

“Who? Mazelli?”

“Yes.”

She looked at him out of such grief-stricken eyes that he felt himself losing his head; he stammered imploringly:

“You . . . you don’t love . . . anyone?”

She answered with downcast eyes:

“I don’t know . . . I love people who love me.”

Abruptly he seized the girl’s two hands and kissed them frantically, in one of those moments of madness when one’s mind reels in tumult and the words that come between one’s lips are more the speech of the maddened flesh than of the bewildered spirit. He stammered:

“I love you, my little Charlotte, I love you!”

With a swift gesture she freed one of her hands and laid it against his mouth, murmuring:

“Hush. . . . Please, please hush. It would hurt me too dreadfully if it were only another lie.”

She had risen; he stood up, took her in his arms, and crushed her forcibly to him.

A sudden noise drove them apart; old Oriol had just come in and was staring at them in utter bewilderment. Then he shouted:

“You sod, you filthy sod! . . . bloody savage!”

Charlotte fled, and the two men were left face to face.

After a horrified pause, Paul tried to explain:

“My God, sir, I have behaved . . . I certainly have . . . like a . . .”

But the old man was not listening; rage, a mad rage, took possession of him and he advanced on Brétigny with doubled fists, repeating:

“Bloody savage!”

Then, when he was right on him, he seized him by the collar with his two gnarled peasant hands. But the other man, as big as he was, and strong with the skilled strength of the athlete, shook off the Auvergne man's grip with a single effort, and pinned him against the wall.

"Listen to me, Oriol, we don't need to fight, but to understand one another. It's true I've kissed your daughter. . . . I swear to you it's the first time . . . and I swear, too, that I want to marry her."

The old man's physical fury had vanished before his adversary's onslaught, but his rage was unappeased, and he stuttered:

"Oh, that's it, is it? You're going to rob the girl, you're after her money. Damned scoundrel ——"

Then, all the feelings he had been nursing in his heart rushed out in a flood of disconsolate words. He was not reconciled to the dowry promised to the eldest, and to the thought of his vines' passing into the hands of these Paris folk. He had his suspicions now of Gontran's poverty and Andermatt's astuteness, and, forgetting the un hoped-for fortune that the banker had brought him, he poured out his bile and all his secret resentment against these evil-doers who would not let him sleep in peace.

He talked as if Andermatt, his family, and his friends came every night to suck his blood, to rob him of something, his lands, his springs, and his daughters.

He flung these reproaches in Paul's face, accusing him as well of having an eye to his wealth, of being a down-right knave and taking Charlotte for the sake of her property.

The other man quickly lost patience and shouted in his face:

"But I'm richer than you are, you damned old mule! I'll give you some of it, I'll give you money! . . ."

The old man listened in a sceptical but attentive silence, and went on with his recriminations in a milder voice.

Paul answered him this time, and explained; and, feeling himself bound by this mischance for which he was entirely to blame, offered to marry Charlotte without asking the smallest dowry.

Old Oriol shook his head and his ears and made him say it again; he didn't understand it. He still thought of Brétigny as a penniless beggar, a financial whited sepulchre.

And when Brétigny, thoroughly exasperated, yelled in his face: "But I've an income of more than a hundred and twenty thousand francs, you old idiot! Don't you understand? Three million! . . ." the other asked suddenly:

"Will you write that down, on a paper?"

"Of course I'll write it."

"And sign it?"

"Of course I'll sign it."

"On a lawyer's paper?"

"Yes, certainly, on a lawyer's paper."

Then, getting up, he opened his cupboard, took out two sheets of paper marked with the government stamp, and, seeking the agreement that Andermatt had extracted from him a few days before, he wrote out a fantastic marriage contract involving a guaranteed three millions by the fiancé, and Brétigny had to append his signature at the bottom.

When Paul found himself outside, he felt as if the whole world had turned upside down. He was engaged, by no will of his or hers, by one of those chances, one of those wry tricks played on us by life, that allow of no retreat. "What madness!" he murmured. Then he thought: "Well, I dare say I couldn't have made a better choice in all the world." And, in the depths of his heart, he rejoiced in the pit that fate had dug for him.

VI

The next day began badly for Andermatt. When he arrived at the Hydropathic, he learned that Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur had died during the night at the Splendid Hotel of an attack of apoplexy. Quite apart from the fact that the engineer was very useful to him, with his experience, his disinterested zeal, and the love he felt for the Mont-Oriol establishment, which he seemed to cherish as a daughter, it was most regrettable that an invalid who had come to combat a tendency to high blood pressure should have died from this precise cause in the very middle of his treatment, and when the new town was on the threshold of success.

The banker, in a state of terrible agitation, strode up and down the consulting-room of the absent inspector; he tried to think of some way in which the unlucky event could be attributed to another cause, a fall, an imprudent act, the rupture of an aneurism, and waited impatiently for the arrival of Doctor Latonne, to arrange for the death certificate to be drawn up so carefully that no suspicion would fall on the initial cause of the accident.

The medical inspector entered abruptly, his face pale and distraught, and as soon as he got inside the door, he asked:

“You’ve heard this deplorable news?”

“Yes, the death of Monsieur Aubry-Pasteur.”

“No, no, Doctor Mazelli’s elopement with Professor Cloche’s daughter.”

Andermatt felt a cold shiver run down his spine.

“What? What’s that you say?”

"Oh, my dear sir, it's a frightful disaster, a crushing blow."

He sat down and mopped his brow. Then he related the facts, such as he had got them from Petrus Martel, who had had them straight from the professor's manservant.

The Mazelli had laid violent siege to the red-haired damsel, an arrant flirt and jade, whose first husband had died of phthisis, the result, it was said, of their too early marriage. But Monsieur Cloche had seen through the Italian doctor's plans: he had no intention of accepting this adventurer as his second son-in-law, and, surprising him on his knees before his daughter, had kicked him out of the house.

Mazelli, thrust out of the door, promptly returned through the window with the lover's silken ladder. There were two versions of the story. According to the first, he had made the professor's daughter wild with love and jealousy; according to the second, he had continued to meet her secretly, while pretending to devote himself to another woman, and when at last his mistress gave him to understand that the professor was obstinate, he had carried her off the very same night, making marriage absolutely necessary after such a scandal.

Doctor Latonne stood up; he leaned against the chimney-piece, while Andermatt, completely overwhelmed, tramped up and down the room, and exclaimed:

"Think of a doctor, a doctor, my dear sir, a doctor, doing such a thing! . . . a doctor of medicine! . . . what a lack of self-respect!"

The unhappy Andermatt was reckoning up the consequences, classing and weighing them with mathematical precision. They were as follows: First: The horrid rumour would spread throughout the neighbouring spas to Paris. Taking the best possible view of this, it might be possible to turn the elopement into a good advertisement.

A fortnight's cleverly contrived paragraphs in the biggest newspapers would direct a fierce glow of publicity on Mont-Oriol. Second: The departure of Professor Cloche, a clear loss. Third: The departure of the Duke and Duchess de Ramas-Aldavarra, another inevitable loss, with no possible balance of gain.

Taking it all round, Doctor Latonne was right. It was a frightful catastrophe.

The banker turned to the doctor:

"You must go at once to the Splendid Hotel and make out Aubry-Pasteur's death certificate in such terms that no one will suspect apoplexy."

Doctor Latonne picked up his hat, then, pausing on the threshold, remarked:

"Oh, there's another bit of gossip going about. Is it true that your friend Paul Brétigny is going to marry Charlotte Oriol?"

Andermatt started in surprise:

"Brétigny? Upon my word! Who told you that?"

"Oh, more of Petrus Martel's chatter! He had it from old Oriol himself."

"From old Oriol?"

"Yes, from old Oriol, who declared that his future son-in-law had a fortune of three millions."

William did not know what to think. He murmured:

"Well, really, it's quite likely; he's been hanging round her for some time. If it's true, the hill's ours . . . the whole hill. . . . Oh, I must make sure about this at once."

He followed the doctor out, to find Paul before lunch.

When he entered the hotel, they told him that his wife had asked for him several times. He found her still in bed, talking to her father and to Gontran, who was looking through the papers with a cursory and indifferent glance.

She felt ill, very ill, and uneasy. She was afraid,

without knowing what she feared. And then an idea had come into her head and had gradually taken hold of her, as ideas do take hold of pregnant women. She wanted to consult Doctor Black. She heard Doctor Latonne so constantly made light of by her family that she had lost all confidence in him and wanted another advice, Doctor Black's, whose fame continued to grow. Fears, all the fears and obsessions that haunt pregnant women as their time draws near, tore at her now from morning till night. The night before, she had had a dream, and since then had been haunted by the thought that the child was badly placed, and had got into such a position that its birth was impossible and there would have to be a Cæsarean section. And her mind pictured her to herself as present at the operation. She saw herself lying on her back, with her body cut open in a bed filled with blood, while they carried out something red that neither moved nor cried, a dead thing. Every ten minutes she shut her eyes and saw it all again, went again through her horrible and bitter torture. Then she took it into her head that no one but Doctor Black could tell her the truth, and she clamoured for him to come at once, insisting that he should examine her without one moment's delay.

Much disturbed, Andermatt kept repeating:

"But, my dear child, it's very difficult, seeing my relations with Latonne . . . it's . . . practically impossible. Listen, I've a better idea: I'll go and bring Professor Mas-Roussel, who's a hundred times cleverer than Black. He won't refuse to come."

But she was obstinate. She wanted Black, no one else. She needed the sight of him, to see his great bulldog head beside her. It was a longing, a crazy superstitious desire: she must have him.

Then William tried to distract her attention:

"Do you know that that rascal Mazelli eloped last night with Professor Cloche's daughter? They've gone,

scooted goodness knows where. There's a scandal for you!"

She had raised herself on her pillow, her eyes wide with grief; she stammered:

"Oh, the poor duchess! . . . poor woman, how sorry I am for her!"

Her heart had long guessed the secret of that other tortured passionate heart. She suffered the same pain and wept the same tears.

But she persisted:

"Listen, Will, go and bring me Monsieur Black. I am sure I shall die if he doesn't come."

Andermatt took her hand and kissed it tenderly:

"Now, now, my little Christiane . . . be reasonable . . . try to realise . . ."

He saw tears in her eyes and turned to the marquis:

"You must arrange it, my dear father-in-law. I can't do it myself. Black comes here about one o'clock every day to see the Princess de Maldebourg. Stop him in the passage and call him in to see your daughter. You can easily wait an hour, can't you, Christiane?"

She consented to wait an hour, but refused to get up to take lunch with the men, who went to the dining-room without her.

Paul was already there. Andermatt, catching sight of him, cried:

"Ah, tell me now, what is this I hear everywhere? You're marrying Charlotte Oriol? It's not true, is it?"

The young man threw an anxious glance towards the closed door and answered softly:

"It's true, all right."

The others had known nothing about it, and all three stared at him in amazement.

"What ever made you do it?" William demanded. "To get yourself married, with your fortune? Cumber yourself with one woman, when you can have all? And,

in any event, the family is none too distinguished. It's all very well for Gontran who hasn't a sou!"

Brétigny burst out laughing:

"My father made his money in flour. So he was a miller . . . on a large scale. If you'd known him, you might have said of him, too, that he lacked distinction. As for the girl . . ."

Andermatt interrupted him:

"Oh, perfect . . . delightful . . . perfect . . . and you know . . . she'll be as rich as you, if not richer. . . . I'll answer for it, I will, I'll answer for that."

Gontran murmured:

"Yes, marriage is no hindrance to other things and covers retreats. But he ought to have told us beforehand. How the devil did it all happen, my dear?"

Then Paul told the story, with some reservations. He told them his hesitations, exaggerating them, and of his sudden decision when some words the girl let fall led him to believe that she loved him. He described the unexpected entrance of old Oriol, their quarrel, which lost nothing as he told it, the peasant's doubts about his wealth, and the stamped paper produced from the cupboard.

Andermatt laughed until he cried, and thumped his fist on the table.

"Oh, he played the stamped paper trick, too, did he? I invented that."

But Paul, flushing a little, stammered:

"I hope you won't tell your wife the news yet. We're such good friends that I ought to tell her myself."

Gontran was watching his friend with a queer pleased smile that quite clearly said: "That's all very well, all very well. That's how things ought to end, without talk, scandal, or melodrama."

He suggested:

"If you like, Paul, old thing, we'll go together after

lunch, when she's up, and you can tell her what you are going to do."

Their eyes met in a steady glance that said the unsayable and then looked away.

Paul answered indifferently:

"Very well, we'll discuss it later."

A servant came in to tell them that Doctor Black had just come to see the princess; and the marquis went out to waylay him in the passage.

He explained the situation to the doctor, his son-in-law's awkward position and his daughter's desire, and carried him off without a protest.

As soon as the little man's big head appeared in Christiane's room, she said:

"Leave us alone, papa."

The marquis withdrew. Then she enumerated her anxieties, her fears and her nightmares, talking in a soft gentle voice as if she were at confession. And the doctor listened to her as a priest listens, scrutinising her now and then with his large round eyes, showing his attentive interest by a little word, murmuring a "That's it" which seemed to say: "I know your case through and through, and I'll cure you when I get ready."

When she finished speaking, he began to question her himself in the most minute detail, on her life, her habits, diet and treatment. Sometimes he seemed to approve with a gesture, sometimes he disapproved with an "Oh" that left volumes unspoken. When she came to her dread that the child was badly placed, he rose and, with a priest-like modesty, passed his hands over her as she lay under the blankets, then declared: "No, it couldn't be better."

She was ready to embrace him. What a splendid man this doctor was!

He took a sheet of paper from the table and wrote his prescription. It was long, very long. Then he came

back to the bedside and, using quite a different tone of voice, to make it clear that he had finished his sacred professional task, began a conversation.

He had a deep oily voice, the powerful voice of a thick-set dwarf; and his most commonplace phrases concealed a question. He talked about everything. Gontran's marriage seemed to interest him deeply. Then, with the unpleasant smile of a deformed creature, he said:

"I won't say anything to you yet about Monsieur Brétigny's marriage, although it is no longer a secret, for old Oriol is telling everyone."

A swooning weakness came upon her; it began in her finger-tips and flooded through her body, arms, breast, bowels, legs. She did not understand, however, but a dreadful fear of being left in ignorance lent her a sudden prudence, and she stammered:

"So old Oriol is telling everyone, is he?"

'He is, indeed. He spoke to me about it only ten minutes ago. It seems that Monsieur Brétigny is very rich, and has loved little Charlotte for a long time. It was Madame Honorat, moreover, who made both matches. She lent a hand — in her house — to enable the young people to meet."

Christiane had shut her eyes. She had fainted.

A chambermaid came hurrying at the doctor's call; then the marquis, Andermatt, and Gontran appeared and went in search of vinegar, smelling-salts, ice, twenty different and useless things.

The young woman moved suddenly, opened her eyes and lifted her arms; she writhed in the bed, and a dreadful cry was torn from her. She tried to speak, stammering: "Oh, the pain! . . . my God! . . . the pain . . . in my back . . . it tears me . . . oh, my God!" And her cries began again.

It was evident that the birth of the child was imminent.

Thereupon Andermatt rushed off to bring Dr. Latonne and found him finishing his meal.

"Come at once! . . . My wife has suddenly been taken ill! . . . Come at once!"

Then he bethought himself of a useful excuse, and told how Doctor Black had been in the hotel when the first pains began.

Doctor Black himself confirmed this in speaking to his colleague:

"I was on my way to see the princess when I was told that Madame Andermatt was ill. I hurried to her. It was high time!"

But William, in a state of feverish excitement, his heart pounding, his mind in a whirl, was suddenly seized with doubts of the two men's capabilities; and he went out again, bare-headed, rushed to Professor Mas-Roussel's house, and begged him to come. The professor agreed forthwith, and buttoned his morning coat with the mechanical gesture of a doctor setting off on his rounds; he walked with hurried strides, the solemn strides of an eminent man whose mere presence can save a life.

As soon as he entered, the other two consulted him humbly, and with the utmost deference, repeating in unison or nearly in unison:

"What has happened is this, *cher maître*? . . . don't you think, *cher maître*? . . . Wouldn't it be so, *cher maître*? . . ."

Andermatt too, is an agony of misery at his wife's groans, harassed Monsieur Mas-Roussel with questions, openly calling him *cher maître*.

Christiane, lying almost naked before these men, no longer saw or knew or understood anything: she was in such dreadful pain that thought had fled. She felt as if a blunt saw were being drawn across the lower half of her back, tearing apart bone and muscle, with a slow

irregular movement, jerking, pausing, and beginning again, with a frightful pain that grew worse and worse.

When for a moment the torture slackened, when the tearing agony of her body gave her mind leave to think, then one thought took hold of her mind, crueler, sharper, more frightful than the physical pain: he loved another woman and he was going to marry her.

And to deaden the biting grief that gnawed at her brain, she struggled to bring on herself the atrocious torments of her flesh. She twisted her body, arched her back: when the crisis began again, at least she could not think.

For fifteen hours she was tormented, so lashed by pain and despair that she wanted to die, strove to die in the spasms that twisted her body. But, after a longer and more violent convulsion than any she had suffered, she felt as if all at once her entrails had rushed out of her body. It was over: her pains died away like waves sinking to rest; and the relief she felt was so great that her misery of mind was momentarily appeased. Someone spoke to her; she answered in a low weary voice.

Suddenly Andermatt's face leaned over her and he said:

"She will live . . . she's almost full time. . . . It's a girl."

Christiane could only murmur:

"Oh, my God!"

So she had a child, a living child, who would grow . . . a child of Paul's. She was ready to weep again, so fiercely this fresh grief gnawed at her heart. She had a daughter! She did not want her! She would not see her! . . . She would never touch her!

They had cared for her and made her comfortable in bed again, kissed her! Who? Probably her father and her husband. She did not know. But where was he? What was he doing? How happy she would have felt now, had he loved her!

Time passed; the hours followed each other while she lay without noticing whether it were day or night; one thought was burning into her brain: he loved another woman.

The sudden thought came to her: "Suppose it were not true? How is it I didn't know sooner, before that doctor?"

Then she reflected that it had been kept from her. Paul had taken care that she wasn't told.

She looked round her room to see who was there. A strange woman was watching her, a working-woman. She dared not question her. Who could she ask about it?

The door was suddenly opened. Her husband came in on tiptoe. Seeing her eyes open, he approached:

"Do you feel better?"

"Yes, thanks."

"You've been giving us a rare fright since yesterday. But the danger's over now. And, by the way, I'm in a sudden difficulty about you. I telegraphed to your friend, Madame Icardon, who should have been with you when the baby was born, telling her that it had happened unexpectedly, and begged her to come. She is with her nephew, who has scarlet fever. . . . But you can't go on without anyone about you, without some woman more . . . more suitable. So one of the ladies in the town has offered to look after you and keep you company all day, and, upon my word, I've accepted the offer. It's Madame Honorat."

Christiane suddenly remembered Doctor Black's words. A convulsive shudder of fear ran through her body, and she moaned:

"Oh, no . . . no . . . not her . . . not . . . her!"

William did not understand, and persisted:

"Listen, I'm quite aware she's hopelessly vulgar; but your brother has a great respect for her: she has been very useful to him; and then they say she used to

be a midwife that Honorat met when she was attending one of his patients. If she offends you beyond bearing, I'll dismiss her to-morrow. But do try her. Let her come once or twice."

She was silent, thinking. A need to know, to know everything, took such violent hold of her that the prospect of setting this same woman's tongue wagging, of drawing from her, one by one, the words that would tear her heart, made her long to answer: "Go . . . go and bring her at once . . . at once . . . please go."

And to her irresistible desire to know was added a strange need to suffer yet more deeply, to writhe in her unhappiness as in a bed of thorns, a sick woman's mysterious need, a martyr's ecstatic yearning for pain.

So she stammered:

"Yes, I'd like her to come; bring me Madame Honorat."

Then suddenly she felt that she could not live any longer without being sure, quite sure, of Paul's treachery, and, in a mere weak whisper of a voice, asked William:

"Is it true that Monsieur Brétigny is to be married?"

He answered clamly:

"Yes, it's true. We should have told you before if we had been allowed to talk to you."

She said:

"To Charlotte?"

"To Charlotte."

But William himself had a fixed idea that had already begun to fill his mind: his daughter, hardly living yet, whom all day long he kept coming to gaze upon. He resented the fact that Christiane's first words had not been for the child, and, in a gently reproachful voice, said:

"Well, now, you haven't asked for the baby. Do you know she's getting on very well?"

She shuddered as if he had touched an open sore; but she must pass all the stations of her Calvary.

“Bring her,” she said.

He disappeared behind the curtain at the foot of the bed, and came back, his face alight with pride and joy, holding in awkward hands a bundle of white linen.

He laid it on the embroidered pillow near Christiane's head; Christiane felt her emotions choking her; he said:

“There, look how lovely she is!”

She looked.

He held back between two fingers the fine lace that veiled a tiny red face, so small, so red, with closed eyes and a mouth that moved.

And, bending over this scrap of new life, she thought: “This is my daughter . . . Paul's daughter. . . . And this is the creature for whom I was tortured. . . . This . . . this . . . this . . . my daughter.”

The repulsion she felt for the child whose birth had so frightfully torn her poor heart and her soft woman's body vanished on the instant; she contemplated it now with a burning sorrowful curiosity, a profound wonder, like the wonder of a mother-beast who sees her first-born issue from her body.

Andermatt expected her to kiss the child passionately. He was again surprised and shocked, and demanded:

“Aren't you going to kiss her?”

She leaned gently over the tiny red face; and the closer she brought her lips, the more she felt them drawn to her, called by her. And when she had pressed her lips to the tiny face, when she touched it, faintly moist, faintly warm as it was, warm with her own life, she felt that she could never take them away again from the childish flesh, but must let them stay there for ever.

Something brushed her cheek. It was her husband's beard, as he stooped to caress her. And when he had

held her to him in a long embrace, in a passion of gratitude, he too wished to kiss his daughter, and with out-thrust lips dropped light brief kisses on her nose.

Christiane, her heart wrung by this caress, looked at them there beside her, her daughter and him . . . and him!

A moment later he made a movement to carry the child back to its cradle.

"No," she said, "leave it here a few minutes longer, so that I can feel it near my head. Don't speak or move, just let me alone, and wait."

She slipped an arm under the body wrapped in its swaddling-clothes, laid her face quite close to the little wrinkled face, shut her eyes, and lay there motionless, thinking of nothing.

But after a few minutes William touched her gently on the shoulder.

"Come, my darling, you must be sensible. No excitement, you know, no excitement!"

He carried off their daughter; the mother's eyes followed her until she had disappeared behind the hangings of the bed.

Then he came back:

"It's agreed that I send Madame Honorat in to-morrow morning to keep you company."

She answered in a voice she kept quite steady:

"Yes, my dear, you can send her to me . . . to-morrow morning."

She laid her weary broken body down in the bed, a little less unhappy, perhaps?

Her father and her brother came to see her in the evening and told her all the local gossip, the precipitate departure of Professor Cloche in search of his daughter, and the speculations that were rife about the Duchess de Ramas, who was never seen, and was believed to have left too, in search of Mazelli. Gontran laughed at these

adventures and drew a humorous moral from the happenings:

"These spas are simply incredible. They are the only faery places left on earth. More things happen in them in two months than happen in the rest of the world during the rest of the year. You'd really think that the springs were bewitched, not mineralized. It's the same thing everywhere: at Aix, Royat, Vichy, Luchon, and in the seaside places too, at Dieppe, Étretat, Trouville, Biarritz, Cannes, Nice. You meet there specimens of all nationalities, and all classes, wonderful scoundrels, a hotchpotch of nationalities and people never found anywhere else, and the most amazing adventures. Lovely woman stoops to folly in these places with a delightful ease and willingness. In Paris she resists, at the spas and seaside towns she falls, that's all! As for men, some find a fortune there, like Andermatt, others find death, like Aubry-Pasteur, others find worse than that there . . . and engage themselves to be married . . . like me . . . and like Paul. It's stupid and funny both at once, isn't it? You knew Paul was going to be married, didn't you?"

She murmured:

"Yes, William told me about it before."

Gontran went on:

"He's wise, very wise. She's a peasant girl. And at that she's worth more than an adventurer's daughter or a harlot. I know Paul. He would have ended by marrying a beggar girl if she'd only resisted him for six weeks. No one but a clever jade or complete innocence could resist him. He happens to have been caught by innocence. So much the better for him!"

Christiane listened, and every word that entered her ear struck to her heart and sorely wounded her.

She closed her eyes and said:

"I am dreadfully tired. I'd like to rest a little."

They kissed her and left her.

She could not sleep; her thoughts, roused to restless activity again, tortured her. The thought that he did not love her any more, no more at all, grew so intolerable to her that, but for the sight of the woman, the nurse, drowsing in an arm-chair, she would have left her bed, opened the window, and thrown herself on the front door-steps. A slender moon-ray pierced between the curtains and lay in a small round patch on the floor. She caught sight of it: all her memories rushed over her in a flood: the lake, the wood, the first "I love you," hardly heard, infinitely distressing, and Tournoël, and all the kisses given in shadowed lanes in the evening, and the road to Roche-Pradière. In a sudden vision she saw this white road under a starry night sky, and Paul himself with his arm round a woman whose mouth he kissed at each step. She recognised her. It was Charlotte. He held her close, smiled as he could smile, murmured in her ear those dear words that came so readily from his lips, then threw himself on his knees and kissed the ground at her feet as he had kissed it at Christiane's. It was so bitter, so bitter to her that she turned to hide her face in the pillow and began to sob. She could hardly keep the cries from her lips, so heavily on her spirit pressed her despair.

Every heart-beat that hammered in her throat and throbbed in her temples cried the one word: "Paul — Paul — Paul," endlessly repeated. She covered her ears with her hands to shut out the sound of it, buried her head under the bed-clothes; but the name rang far within her breast with every beat of her heart that would not be comforted.

The nurse woke up and asked:

"Do you feel worse, madame?"

Christiane turned away, the tears pouring down her face, and murmured:

"No, I was asleep, dreaming. . . . I felt frightened."

Then she begged her to light two wax candles so that she should no longer see the moon-ray.

Towards morning, however, she became drowsy.

She had slept for several hours when Andermatt came in, bringing Madame Honorat with him. The fat dame, assuming a familiar tone at once, sat down beside the bed, took the young mother's hands, questioned her like a doctor, then, satisfied with the replies, declared:

"Well, well, you're going on all right."

Then she took off her hat, her gloves, and her shawl, and, turning towards the nurse, said:

"You can take yourself off, my girl. You'll come if I ring for you."

Christiane, loathing her already, said to her husband:

"Give me my daughter for a few minutes."

Even as on the day before, William kissed the child tenderly when he brought it, and placed it on the pillows. And for Christiane too, even as on the day before — when through all its coverings she felt against her cheek the warmth of this unknown body swaddled in its robes — a heavenly calm descended straightway on her spirit.

Suddenly the child began to cry, wailing in a shrill piercing voice.

"She wants the breast," said Andermatt.

He rang, and the wet-nurse came, an enormous red-cheeked woman, with the mouth of a giantess, filled with large gleaming teeth that almost frightened Christiane. From her opened bodice she drew a huge drooping breast, soft and heavy with milk like the udder of a cow. And when Christiane saw her daughter drinking from this fleshly gourd, she longed to seize her and take her to herself, a little jealous and disgusted.

Thereupon Madame Honorat gave the nurse various pieces of advice, and the woman went away, carrying the child.

Andermatt went out as well. The two women were left alone.

Christiane did not know how to speak of the thing that was torturing her mind; she was desperately afraid of showing too much emotion, of weeping, of betraying herself. But Madame Honorat began to chatter of her own accord, without waiting to be questioned. When she had retailed all the local gossip, she came to the Oriol family.

"They're excellent people," said she, "excellent people. If you'd known the mother, a pleasant-spoken thrifty woman! She was worth ten, madame. The children take after her, too."

Then, seeing she was about to attack another subject, Christiane said:

"Which of the two do you prefer, Louise or Charlotte?"

"Oh, well, madame, I like Louise better, your brother's choice, she's steadier and more sensible. She's order personified. But my husband prefers the other one. Men have their tastes, you know, different from ours."

She was silent. Christiane, whose courage was failing her, stammered:

"My brother often met his fiancée at your house."

"Oh, yes, madame, he did indeed: every day, I think. It all happened at my house, all of it. I leave these children to talk to each other, I do; I know all about how these things happen. But what really pleased me was when I saw that Monsieur Paul was after the young one."

Then Christiane, her voice hardly audible, said:

"He loves her very much?"

"Love her, madame! He's absolutely gone off his head about her these last few days. And then when the Italian, the man who's gone off with Doctor Cloche's daughter, was hanging round the girl, just by way of

looking and tasting, you know, I really thought they were going to come to blows. . . . If you'd seen Monsieur Paul's eyes! He looked at her as if she were the Holy Virgin herself. It does you good to see love like that."

Then Christiane questioned her about everything that had happened in her sight, all they had said and done, their walks in the Sans-Souci valley, where he had so many times told her of his love. She asked odd questions that surprised the fat dame, about the most unexpected things, for she was all the time drawing comparisons; she recalled a thousand details of the past year, all Paul's gay delicate love-making, his unfailing consideration, the quick subtle ways he found to do her pleasure, all that usage of charming attentions and tender care that prove a man's passionate desire to please and hold. And she wanted to know whether he had done all these things for this other woman, if he had set out to conquer her soul with the same ardour, the same burning impulse, the same irresistible passion.

And each time that Christiane, lying there on her bed, recognised some little fact, some little trait, one of those absurd and divine little things, those disturbing unexpected things that set the heart wildly beating, and that Paul so royally gave to a beloved woman, a small moan of pain came between her lips.

Surprised by this strange cry, Madame Honorat insisted:

"Yes, really. I'm not exaggerating a bit, not the least bit. I've never seen a man so much in love as he is."

"And poems — does he ever say any to her?"

"I'm sure he does, madame, and very nice ones too."

They were both silent, and there was no sound but the nurse's gentle crooning song, as she hushed the child to sleep in the next room.

Steps drew near in the corridor. The two doctors,

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Mas-Roussel and Latonne, came to visit their patient. They found her restless, and not so well as on the previous day.

When they had gone, Andermatt reopened the door and, without coming in, said:

"Here's Doctor Black wants to see you. You'd like him to, wouldn't you?"

She lifted herself up in bed, and cried:

"No! . . . no! . . . I don't want to! . . . no!"

Utterly astonished, William came into the room.

"Oh, come now, listen . . . one simply must . . . it's only decent . . . you must. . . ."

Her wide eyes and quivering mouth were like a mad creature's. In a high thin voice, so loud a voice that it must have pierced any wall, she repeated:

"No! . . . no! . . . never! . . . he must never come! . . . do you hear . . . never!"

And then, unconscious now what she was saying, she pointed an outstretched arm at Madame Honorat where she stood in the middle of the room:

"Nor that woman either! . . . send her away! . . . I won't see her! . . . send her away!"

He rushed towards his wife, took her in his arms, and kissed her face.

"My little Christiane, hush, hush. What's the matter with you? . . . Hush, hush."

She could not speak now. The tears were pouring from her eyes.

"Send them all away," she said, "and stay with me by yourself."

He ran in dismay to the doctor's wife and, pushing her gently towards the door, said:

"Leave us alone for a few minutes, please. It's fever, milk fever. I'll soothe her. I'll come and speak to you in a moment."

When he turned back to the bed, Christiane had lain

down again; she lay quite still, crying in a ceaseless terrible fashion. And, for the first time in his life, he too cried.

Milk fever actually set in during the night and she grew delirious.

After several hours of extreme restlessness, the sick woman suddenly began to talk.

The marquis and Andermatt had wanted to stay near her and were playing cards, keeping the score in whispers; they thought she was calling them, and, getting up, stood beside the bed.

She neither saw nor recognised them. Pale among her white pillows, her fair hair over her shoulders, she stared with clear blue eyes into the unknown world, the mysterious fantastic world of the mad.

Her hands, stretched out on the coverlet, moved now and then; they were shaken by quick involuntary movements, they trembled and jerked.

At first she did not seem to be talking to any particular person, but to be seeing and describing things. The things she said seemed inconsequential and meaningless. She talked of a rock that was too high for her to jump. She was afraid of a sprain, and then she did not know well enough the man who was holding out his arms for her. Then she spoke of perfumes. She seemed to be seeking forgotten phrases: "What is sweeter? . . . It goes to the head like wine. . . . Wine makes drunk the reason . . . but perfume intoxicates the imagination. . . . In perfume one tastes the very essence, the pure essence of things and of the world . . . tastes flowers . . . trees . . . the grass of the field . . . touches the very soul of ancient dwellings where it sleeps in the old furniture, the old carpets, and the old curtains."

Then her face contorted, as if she had endured a long weary effort. She was climbing a slope, slowly, hardly, and saying to someone: "Oh, please carry me again, I

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shall die here! I can't walk any farther. Carry me as you did up above the gorges. Do you remember? . . . How you loved me!"

An anguished cry broke from her: horror stared out of her eyes. She saw a dead beast in front of her and begged them to take it away without hurting it.

The marquis said softly to his son-in-law:

"She's thinking of an ass we came upon as we were coming back from Nugére."

Now she was talking to this dead beast, comforting it, telling it that she too was very unhappy, even more unhappy, because she had been deserted.

Then all at once she shrank from some task that was being exacted from her. She cried: "Oh, no, not that! Oh, it's you, it's you who want to make me drag that cart!"

Then she panted, as if she were indeed dragging a cart. She wept, groaned, cried out, and for more than half an hour went on climbing the hill, drawing behind her with a frightful effort what must have been the ass's cart.

And someone beat her cruelly, for she kept saying: "Oh, how you hurt me! Don't beat me any more, I'll walk — but don't beat me any more, please, please! I'll do what you want, but don't beat me any more! . . ."

Then gradually her agony seemed to pass and she fell into gentle rambling talk that went on until dawn. Then she grew drowsy and at last slept. When she woke, about two o'clock in the afternoon, the fever was still on her, but her reason had returned to her.

Until the next day, however, her brain remained numb, a little confused, and scattered. She had difficulty in finding the words she wanted, and utterly exhausted herself in the effort.

But after a restful night she was quite quiet in her mind again.

She felt a change in herself, however, as if this crisis had changed her very soul. She suffered less and thought more. The dreadful things that had happened so lately loomed dimly in the far-off past, and she thought about them with a clearness that her mind had never before achieved. This light that had suddenly flooded her mind, a light that comes to some minds in hours of suffering, showed her life, men, things, the whole earth and all that therein is, as she had never seen them before.

And now, even more sharply than on that evening in her bedroom, after the return from Lake Tazenat, when she had felt herself so alone in the world, she saw herself as utterly adrift in life. She understood that though all men walk side by side through the shifting changes of life, no two are ever really together. Through the treachery of him in whom she had put all her trust, she felt that others, all others, would never be for her more than casual neighbours in this voyage that may be short or long, sad or gay — to-morrow, to-morrow, and to-morrow, a tale of days whose happenings no man can foretell. She realised that even when she lay in this man's arms, when she imagined herself mingled with him, entered into him, when she imagined that their souls and bodies were only one soul and one flesh, they had only drawn just near enough to each other for the impenetrable veils in which mysterious nature has isolated and imprisoned human beings to meet and touch. She saw clearly that no one has ever been able, or will ever be able, to break this invisible barrier that sets mortal men as far from one another in life as the stars of the sky.

She saw in her mind man's unwearied impotent effort, never relaxed since the world began, to tear the sheath where his spirit strives, for ever captive, for ever solitary, an effort of arms, lips, eyes, of quivering naked flesh, an effort of love pouring itself away in kisses, to

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come in the end to a mere giving of life to one more lost creature.

Then she was seized by an irresistible desire to see her daughter again. She asked for her, and when they brought her, she begged them to undress her, for she knew no more of her than her face.

The nurse unrolled all the swaddling-clothes and uncovered the tiny new-born body, quivering with the aimless movements that mark the stirring of life in these embryo beings. Christiane touched her with a timid trembling hand, then would kiss her stomach, her back, her legs, her feet; then she looked at her, her mind full of strange thoughts.

Two creatures saw and loved each other with a divine ecstasy; and from their embrace this was born. This was Paul and herself, united until this little child should die; it was he and she, reborn in one flesh, a part of his being and a part of hers and an unknown human quantity that would make it different from either of them. It reproduced them both, in the form of its body and its spirit, in its traits, gestures, eyes, movements, tastes, passions, even in the sound of its voice and the fashion of its bearing, and yet it would be a new being.

They were separated now, for ever. Their glances would never again mingle in one of those tender ecstasies that make mankind immortal.

And, holding the child against her heart, she murmured:

“Good-bye . . . good-bye.”

It was to him that she was murmuring “Good-bye” in her daughter’s ear, the sad courageous farewell of a proud spirit, the farewell of a woman who will suffer for a long time still, perhaps for ever, but will at least know how to hide her tears from the whole world.

“Ah!” cried William from the half-open door. “I’ve caught you! Give me my daughter, will you?”

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Running to the bed, he seized the child in hands already used to handling her and, holding her above his head, repeated:

"Good morning, Mademoiselle Andermatt . . . good morning, Mademoiselle Andermatt . . ."

Christiane thought: "This is my husband." And she regarded him with wondering eyes, as if they rested on him for the first time. This was the man to whom the law had bound and delivered her, the man who, according to all human, religious and social ideas, must needs be a half of herself; more than that, her master, the master of her days and her nights, of her heart and her body. She was almost ready to smile, so odd did this seem to her just now, for no bond ever existed between these two — none of those bonds, so soon broken, alas! but seeming eternal, ineffably sweet, almost divine.

She did not even feel remorse for having deceived and betrayed him. This surprised her, and she tried to think why it was. Why? It must be that they were too different, too far from one another, too dissimilar in race. He did not understand her at all; she did not understand him. Still, he was kind, devoted, good-natured.

But perhaps only creatures of the same breed, the same nature, the same spiritual essence, can feel held to each other by the sacred bonds of willingly rendered duty.

The child was wrapped in its clothes again. William sat down.

"Listen, darling," said he, "I daren't announce any more visitors since you gave me such a welcome for Doctor Black. You'd be doing me a great kindness, however, if you'd agree to this visit: it's Doctor Bonne-fille who wants to come."

Then she laughed, for the first time, a ghost of a laugh that went no farther than her lips; and she asked:

"Doctor Bonne-fille? What a miracle! So you're reconciled?"

"We are. Listen: I'll tell you — as an absolute secret — a big piece of news. I am going to buy the old company. I have the whole district now. Hey, that's a triumph, isn't it? Poor Doctor Bonnefille knew it before anyone else did, of course. So he made a cunning move: he has been calling for news of you every day, and leaving his card with a word of sympathy. I responded to his advances by calling on him, and by now we're on the best of terms."

"Let him come when he likes," said Christiane. "I'll be very pleased to see him."

"Thanks, that's splendid. I'll bring him in to-morrow morning. There's no need for me to tell you that Paul never fails to give me a thousand kind messages for you, and asks constantly for news of the baby. He wants very much to see her."

For all her resolves, she felt a pang of grief. She did, however, manage to say:

"You must thank him for me."

Andermatt went on:

"He was very anxious to know whether you had been told of his engagement. I told him yes; then he asked me several times what you thought of it."

She rallied all her strength and murmured:

"Tell him that I heartily approve of it."

With cruel persistence, William went on:

"He was very eager, too, to know what you are going to call your daughter. I said that we were hesitating between Marguerite and Genevieve."

"I have changed my mind," she said. "I want to call her Arlette."

Long before, in the first days of her pregnancy, she had discussed with Paul what name they should choose for a boy, and what for a girl; and for a girl they had hesitated between Genevieve and Marguerite. She would not have either of those names now.

William repeated:

"Arlette. . . . Arlette. . . . That's very pretty . . . you're quite right. I would rather have called her Christiane, myself, after you. I love that name . . . Christiane."

She sighed deeply.

"Oh, it doesn't do to be named after Christ crucified: it suggests too much unhappiness."

He flushed, having never thought of that analogy, and stood up.

'Well, Arlette is a very pretty name. Good-bye for a little while, my darling.'

As soon as he had gone, she called the nurse and ordered her to place the cradle near the bed.

When the frail bed, shaped like a tiny ship, swaying all the time, and carrying its white curtains like a sail on its mast of wrought copper, had been rolled near the big bed, Christiane stretched her hand towards the sleeping child and whispered:

"Hushaby, baby. You will never find anyone who will love you as much as I do."

She spent the days that followed in a mood of quiet melancholy, thinking deeply, preparing for herself a courageous spirit and a stout heart to begin life again in a few weeks. She busied herself chiefly in watching her daughter's eyes, trying to surprise therein their first conscious gaze, but she saw only two vague blue pools turned always to the bright light of the window.

And she suffered a bitter grief, thinking that these still slumbering eyes would see the world as she herself had seen it, through the veil of secret dreams that lends a young girl's soul its happy confident gaiety. They would love all that she had loved, clear lovely days, flowers, woods, and people too, alas! They would doubtless love some man. They would love a man. They would bear within them his dear and familiar image,

would see him so when he was absent, would light up when they caught sight of him. . . . And then . . . and then . . . they would learn to weep. Tears, dreadful tears, would roll down these little cheeks. And the frightful agony of love betrayed would change beyond recognition, distraught with anguish and despair, these poor wondering eyes that were so blue.

She kissed the child passionately, saying:

“Never love anyone but me, little love.”

The day came when Professor Mas-Roussel, who called every morning to see her, declared:

“You can get up a little now, madame.”

When the doctor had gone, Andermatt said to his wife:

“It’s very unfortunate that you’re not better yet, because we’re having a very interesting experiment in the Hydro to-day. Doctor Latonne has worked a real miracle with old Clovis by using on him his automotive gymnastic treatment. Would you believe it? The old vagabond walks almost normally now! And you can see him getting better and better after each treatment.”

To please him, she asked:

“Are you going to give a public treatment?”

“Yes and no. “We’re going to give him a treatment before the doctors and a few friends.”

“What time?”

“At three o’clock.”

“Will Monsieur Brétigny be there?”

“Yes, of course. He has promised me he’ll come. The whole medical world will be there. It’s very interesting indeed from the medical point of view.”

“Well,” she said, “as I shall just have got up then, you can ask Monsieur Brétigny to come and see me. He can keep me company while you watch the experiment.”

“Very well, darling.”

“You won’t forget?”

“No, no, you may be sure I won’t.”

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And he went off to summon the spectators.

After the Oriols had tricked him over the paralytic's first treatment, he himself had played on the credulity of sick people, so easily caught and held when it is a question of cure; and now he was acting the farce of this cure with himself a spectator, talking about it so often, with such fervent conviction, that he would have found it hard to say whether he believed in it or not.

Towards three o'clock, all the people he had enticed thither collected at the door of the Hydro and waited for the arrival of old Clovis. He came, leaning on two sticks, still dragging his legs and saluting everyone politely as he passed.

The two Oriols followed him, with the two girls. Paul and Gontran accompanied their betrothed.

Doctor Latonne, talking to Andermatt and Doctor Honorat, was waiting in the big room where the jointed apparatus was installed.

When he saw old Clovis, a gay smile curved his clean-shaven mouth.

"Well," he said, "how are we to-day?"

"Oh, getting on a bit, getting on."

Petrus Martel and Saint-Landri appeared. They wanted to make sure. The first believed, the second doubted. Behind them, amid general surprise, entered Doctor Bonnefille; he came up to greet his rival and held out his hand to Andermatt. Doctor Black was the last to arrive.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen," said Doctor Latonne, bowing to Louise and Charlotte Oriol, "you are going to see a very curious thing. Let me first make it clear that before the treatment this fine fellow could walk a little, a very little. Can you walk without your sticks, my man?"

"Oh, no, mister."

"Very well, we'll begin."

They hoisted the old man on to an arm-chair, strapped his legs to the movable feet of the seat; then, when the inspector gave the order: "Go slowly," the bare-armed assistant turned the crank.

The spectators saw the vagabond's right knee rise, stretch, bend, and straighten out again; then the left knee went through the same movements, and old Clovis, seized with a sudden spasm of joy, burst out laughing and, with his head and his long white beard, imitated all the movements his legs were forced to make.

Andermatt and the four doctors hung over him, examining him with the solemnity of priests performing the prophetic rites, while Colosse and the old man exchanged sly glances.

The doors had been left open and a constant stream of people entered, convinced or anxious patients, crowding round to watch. "Quicker," ordered Doctor Latonne. The toiling man turned faster. The old man's legs began to run, and he, seized by an irresistible merriment, like a child who is being tickled, laughed uproariously, shaking his head like a mad thing. Between the spasms of laughter, he repeated: "What a jape! What a jape!" a phrase he must have picked up from one of his visitors.

Colosse burst out laughing himself; he stamped his feet on the ground and slapped his thighs with his hands, exclaiming:

"You dirty dog, Clovis! . . . you dirty dog, you!"

"That will do," the inspector ordered.

They unstrapped the vagabond, and the doctors stood back to view the result.

Thereupon old Clovis was seen to get down unaided from his chair; and he walked. True, he took very short steps, all doubled up and his face distorted with the exhausting effort after each movement, but he walked!

Doctor Bonnefille spoke first.

"It's a most remarkable case," he declared.

Doctor Black hastened to compliment his colleague. Doctor Honorat alone said nothing.

Gontran murmured in Paul's ear:

"I don't understand it. Look at his face. Are they really taken in, or just letting themselves be taken in?"

But Andermatt was speaking. He told the story of this cure from its first day, the relapse, and the final cure, which showed every sign of being absolutely complete. He added gaily:

"And if our invalid falls back a little every winter, we'll cure him again every summer."

Then he delivered a pompous eulogy on the Mont-Oriol waters, praised their properties, all their properties.

"I myself," said he, "have been able to experience their potency in the case of one who is very dear to me, and if my family is not dying out, it is to Mont-Oriol that I owe it."

But he was struck by a sudden remembrance: he had promised his wife that Paul Brétigny should come and see her. His remorse was very real, for he was full of an affectionate anxiety for her happiness. He looked round the room and, catching sight of Paul, went up to him:

"My dear, I quite forgot to tell you that Christiane is waiting for you at this moment."

Brétigny stammered:

"For me . . . this moment?"

"Yes, she is getting up to-day and she wants to see you before anyone else. So run along at once and tell her I'm sorry I forgot."

Paul went off towards the hotel, his heart beating wildly with emotion.

On the way he met the Marquis de Ravenel, who said:

"My daughter is up and is surprised that she hasn't seen you yet."

But he stopped on the first steps of the staircase to wonder what he was going to say to her. How would

she receive him? Would she be alone? If she should speak of his marriage, what answer should he make?

Since he had heard of the birth of the child, he had not been able to think of Christiane without an uneasy shudder; and every time the thought of their first meeting stirred in his mind, he blushed hotly or turned pale with anguish. His thoughts dwelt, too, with a profound anxiety, on the unknown child whose father he was, and he was tormented by desire to see her and a fear of seeing her. He felt that he had sunk beyond redemption in one of those moral quagmires that leave an undying stain on a man's conscience. But, more than anything else, he dreaded the eyes of this woman whom he had loved so passionately and for so brief a space.

Would she have reproaches for him, tears, or scorn? Was she receiving him only in order to dismiss him?

And what must be his attitude to her? Humble, sorrowful, suppliant, or cold? Should he explain himself or listen in silence? Ought he to sit down or remain standing?

And when he was shown the child, what should he do? What should he say? What show of sentiment ought he to make?

Before the door he hesitated again, and as he touched the bell, he saw that his hand was trembling.

However, he pressed his finger on the little ivory button and heard the electric bell ringing inside the apartment.

A maid came and opened the door and showed him in. And from the door of the drawing-room, he saw Christiane lying on her couch at the far end of the second room and looking at him.

The walk across the two rooms seemed interminable to him. He felt himself swaying, he was afraid of colliding with the chairs, and he dared not look at his feet because that would have meant lowering his eyes. She made no

movement, said no word, waiting until he was quite close to her. Her right hand lay idly on her dress, and her left hand rested on the edge of the cradle completely enveloped in its curtains.

He halted within three paces of her, not knowing what he ought to do. The maid had shut the door behind him. They were alone.

Now he felt a wild impulse to fall on his knees and ask her forgiveness. But very slowly she lifted the hand lying on her dress, and stretched it languidly towards his.

“Good day,” she said gravely.

He hardly dared touch her fingers, but, stooping, brushed them with his lips.

She went on:

“Please sit down.”

He seated himself on a low chair near her feet.

He felt that he ought to speak, but he was dumb and stupid, and he dared not even look at her. At last he stammered:

“Your husband forgot to tell me that you were waiting for me, or I should have come sooner.”

“It doesn’t matter much,” she answered, “whether the moment when we had to see each other comes a little sooner or is delayed a little.”

As she didn’t say anything more, he asked her eagerly:

“I hope you are well now?”

“Thank you. I am as well as I could be after all I’ve been through.”

She was very pale, thinner but prettier than before the baby was born. Her eyes especially had taken on an expressiveness that was new to him. They seemed shadowed, of an intenser blue, less transparent, deeper.

She went on:

“Such hours are hard to endure. But when you have suffered as I have, you feel able to endure anything for the rest of your life.”

Very shaken, he murmured:

“Yes. You have been terribly tried.”

She repeated his words like an echo:

“Yes, terribly.”

For some minutes, they had been hearing gentle movements in the cradle, the hardly audible sound of a child waking from slumber. Brétigny could not stop looking at it; a heavy and growing uneasiness took possession of him; he was tortured by his longing to see the occupant of the cradle.

Then he noticed that the curtains of the cot were secured from top to bottom with the gilt pins that Christiane usually wore on her bodice. He had often amused himself, in earlier days, by taking out the slender crescent-headed pins and fastening them again on his beloved's shoulders.

He understood what she meant to do; his heart contracted; he was seized by a poignant emotion at the sight of this barrier of golden points separating him for ever from this child.

A feeble cry, a faint wail, sounded in this white prison Christiane bent at once to rock the wicker cradle. She spoke almost brusquely:

“You must forgive me for not being able to spare you any more time. I must look after my daughter.”

He stood up, kissed once more the hand she held out to him. As he went out:

“I shall pray for your happiness,” she said.

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